





# HOWTH CASTLE

A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS



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# HOWTH CASTLE

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## Editor's Note

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Many people ask, "What does *Howth Castle* mean?" The following is quoted from our 1987 issue: *Howth Castle is taken from James Joyce's Finnegans Wake, in which the phrase "Howth Castle and Environs" stands for the sleeping protagonist Humphrey Chimpenden Earwicker and the sentiment "here comes everybody," by which Joyce...meant everyone from Eve and Adam onward. This...nomenclature was foisted upon the UMB literary magazine by well intentioned...founder Margot FitzGerald who [believed] "here comes everybody" was by its nature egalitarian and would appeal to the UMass community.*

Another newsworthy item is that, yes, we will be moving again. What would life at *Howth Castle* be without a yearly move? This time, we're making room for the CPCS community's transfer to the Harbor campus. We'll probably return to the Student Life publications office; but a definitive answer before going to press is unlikely, so please phone the Student Life office for more information.

We'd like to thank the writers and artists who submitted to this issue. Also, many thanks to Donna Neal, the Student Senate, *The Mass Media*, Midge Silvio and the Student Life staff, Damien DiBona, Bob Fata, Lynne Bowen, and Richard Shulman.

Students interested in submitting to next year's issue should follow these guidelines:

**For all submissions**, include a cover letter indicating the title, your name, address, phone number and student ID number. The submission should have printed on it only your ID number and the title—nothing else: no name, phone number, etc. We cannot accept submissions which do not follow this guideline.

**Written work** must be typed, double-spaced, and no more than 4,500 words. Print your ID number and title on each page. The deadline for poetry and prose is the last day of the Fall semester.

**Art work** (line drawings, paintings, collages) must be on slides, since we cannot accept originals. If necessary, we'll refer you to a competent art photographer. Write your ID number and the title on the bottom of the slide, and indicate which way to view it. If you're submitting **black and white photography**, please provide a print, not the original. Write your ID number and title on the back. The deadline for all art work is halfway through the Spring semester.

If you have any questions, please call Student Life at 287-7950, or stop by the fourth floor of Wheatley Hall, Room 181.



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FRONT COVER: *Untitled* by Christina Mardirosian

BACK COVER: *Metamorphosis* by Richard Foley







ABDI M. ALI

## (For Jabreel, of course)

I have loved nightly mandolins,  
amalias in my unknown; loved the sea,  
a desert, with my eyes.

I have loved my mother, the pillow of her arms; loved her, island,  
my mosque (Oh, my fear of pigeons!), loved her names for me.

I loved the krishnaic water, the bronze—all her arms, the catholic  
of blue goddesses. I loved the crescent cross, the calvary moon  
loved the man who betrays them three times carnal,  
who brings to illumination  
this habit,  
feet washing the soul.

I have loved you, a contiguous table,  
a potentate, a fist, my father.

I have loved Amalia; loved in rosy bottles,  
in disappearance. In lugubrious  
talk with wine and bread.

LORI A. BYRNE

## Medjool Dates

remind me of abstinence.

The Sufi master, Adnan,  
forbid coffee, animal flesh, sex.

I was allowed the flection of yoga,  
and of the dance. Holy hours whirling,  
beneath the glow of veils, crosshatched  
with my hips.

I was nineteen and had never known  
the humbleness of poverty; the dance  
its own seduction for refrain.

I would dutifully fast to make a lighter head  
for meditation, more fluid the movement  
to oud, doumbek, the ting of finger cymbals  
in beckoning hands.

I knelt to the east, a pilgrim of mysteries  
without comprehension, pressed my forehead  
to the potent symbols of Persian rugs,  
confused dreams with sleep and prayed  
as instructed, emptied of will, hollowed of passion,  
cleared of choice.

"The less you have the freer you are."

With that proverb came servers  
heavy with bowls of brown rice,  
vegetables aromatic with cinnamon,  
velvet white yogurt and the caramel mounds  
of fresh dates.

Medjool dates, fruit of the desert,  
luxury of mind.

I ate as many as my hands  
could hold, memorizing the hot mealy taste,  
sweet as breath. So sweet as to  
make you thirst.

EMC

## The Gray Tailor

is sewing a lining inside my chest,  
bone needle pricking into one side,  
out the other.

He is using leftover wedding-veil,  
Aunt Lorraine's curtains,  
pink organza my mother got  
but never used

—we don't know why it was bought, or saved.

He uses sheets from my first bed,  
a dress for the graduation  
I was not invited to,  
wrappers from food bought  
and not eaten,  
insides of candy-boxes.

He uses the back of a skirt I wore on Christmas,  
my costume that New Year's Eve;  
he uses my sister's old shirts, letters  
she never sent me,  
my own letters.

He sews my old camp t-shirt.  
He sews through and around the motto.

Into each stitch he drops a grain of sand  
or sliver of glass.  
The holes close,  
form envelopes of scar tissue  
around grains and slivers;

tiny lines of braille  
around my breasts,  
stomach  
—places lovers and doctors  
touch.



HEIDI CRON

## Breakfast

Morning's long languidness  
Floating in illusions  
a hand moves down chocolate  
palm feels the soft curves in a sugar cone, with sprinkles  
breath steams by the open freezer  
and ever-moving touches reach for the scooper  
I stretch and consider the squashing spoon  
you encircle me in your double chocolate arms  
mouth round on ice cream scoop shoulder  
and melting drops drip patterns down the cone.

TIMOTHY DANSDILL

## HE DRINKS TO THEM

—Jack

Midnight's oil leaks from his alarm filling his pill bottles. He turns on his good side in search of high noon. He keens like a spiraling fetus, a fly-blown homunculus, something Bosch dreamed of once and painted over. He battles a dry river bed, waking in a sweat fish out of water would fear. He sucks the water skin he was given on his first anonymous birthday twenty years ago. She put it to his lips whispering: *Springwater, sweetheart, for us, for life.* They drank it a decade together, replenishing themselves with children, the one dive their spirits could make and call love, laughing that they really made it this time, made it all seem sane: lost weekends, black outs, denials, one drink at a time, "Who're you calling a drunk, uh?" Easy does it, one day at a time, 12 steps, a higher power, coffee made of styrofoam, "My name's Jack Daniels and I'm an alcoholic." Platitudes perfecting a deliberate crawl, slow and continuous, for crossing a river whose other side was always on his side. He could do it because he did it. The water, not so much wide as hard, makes it easy to drown again, like riding a bike or falling off a wagon. The disease itself a cliché, a single drink a new simile, what he made of love his metaphor, and no one with the wisdom to know the difference even after such strong remembered swimming, which is why he dries out to drown again, why he gets so far gone—he believes he's going back again

for wife, children, his life twenty years  
ahead of him—why his eyes spring water,  
his head waves so rhythmic and slow.  
He is like a fish remembering upstream.  
That is why he drinks. He drinks to them.

# STONES

He harvests ruptures on acres of wrecking  
Bar bent by rock we swear has taken root,  
Rock grown deeper than trees. Each solid foot  
We can't dig makes us dream we're breaking  
Our backs into diamonds, vertebrae flecking  
Cold mineral fires the after life holds like loot.

The sun checks our work; it glares at our boots.  
We sweat, backhand our eyes, swear, but we're faking  
His grave interest. Are we underlings in the service  
Of Sisyphus? Removing Stonehenge demands  
More than his deepening stare, more than our groans  
For spit warm beer. I shout: *High noon, Boss!*  
Nervous, he knows we drink lunch; watching our hands  
unclench his tools, he says: *You win, stones.*

ROSA FREDA

**you**

a zephyr of smog awakes me I unravel my hands  
from my pillow case and wipe my eyes clean of you  
I lay my head on my naked arm unable to re-sleep  
it's just too hot even moon sweats  
wiping her face with black cotton balls I wonder  
how you can travel abroad not call  
when the sound of your voice makes me slither  
like tears into the holes of my telephone receiver  
and why I can't forget the day on the lawn your eyes  
beads of brown suede hidden you squinted at the sun  
your face stubbly blond  
your arms a silk shirt in my open palm



MARK HILL

## Walking Barefoot

Because we know there's so little change  
in the way of gardens: the weeds always  
come back in one form or another; perennials  
like island sunsets return every spring—  
something deep within the soil binds  
our feet even while our eyes and hands fire  
rockets to the four directions.

Or because we hear the constant stir  
of engines through virgin forest: studded blades  
ripping old growth pine; tribal lands turned under  
by shrill plows—we continue to search for new  
footpaths in the jungle even though the old ones  
feel so secure.

Perhaps all the "whys" that beam off endless  
shards of broken glass, like photons in a reactor,  
will one day turn to wet petals strewn about the living-  
room floor. Maybe then we will no longer need  
the protection of hard soled shoes.

CHARLES W. LOWELL III

## Escher Does a Portrait

When you hold his square-framed portrait  
in your hands, you can turn it  
upside-down, sideways, inside-out  
(you can even tilt your head);  
whichever way you hold it,  
it changes, whichever way you change it,  
it stays the same.

ARTO PAYASLIAN

## A Story About Certain Bodies

So I guess this is what  
I came to say when I was  
driving and then just pulled  
over and got out of the car  
and walked to the middle  
of this street on a night left  
behind by rain and other people

and in a few hours, after I'm done  
sleeping by myself and trying to dream  
of the evenly wet asphalt where  
I stood and how many tiny moving  
pieces of light my eyes caught,

I'll get under a hot shower  
and start connecting the points  
of my body with a soapy sponge  
again, and again the bus  
will be late but the same  
middle-aged man will be  
sitting in the back, singing  
to himself in Armenian, singing almost  
in a whisper about being born,

just like the subway train will be  
screeching through the tunnel  
toward the next stop  
and when the doors open  
a small black boy will run in  
before his tired parents  
and he will jump on one of the torn  
seats and begin looking at himself  
in the dark glass as his parents  
tell him to shut up  
because this wasn't the life  
they asked for  
but he won't listen to them

he is all tangled up  
in the excitement of knowing  
how to speak his life's territories  
and then learning to tie  
his shoelaces tomorrow.

# From Alexandria, Virginia We Will Be Flung Into Heaven

We run, some of us with shoelaces  
untied, towards the grey chains, hanging  
in pairs from the January sky,  
blue and crisp with a sun  
we can't feel right away.  
Our mothers raved at us again  
to wear our gloves and coats and hats  
and again they lay in a pile  
under the leave-less maple tree. We can fly  
further that way. In our tee shirts and corduroys  
we prepare to announce our lives  
because every day at school no one listens,  
math is a curse, and we're less in the end.

Now we squeeze and release our knowing  
fingers that end with the dirt on our palms.  
It's cold. Then we touch the metal strands  
and they are colder. We begin  
rocking. We choose not to see  
each other at this point. Our watery eyes  
come and go with our bodies. We are pendulums  
gathering an uneasy speed, a beautiful speed  
that says we are lost. And finally there  
is a rhythmic drop to and away  
from the large patch of ground, a moment  
when we must decide for ourselves  
that we cannot decide, that we are locked  
into this motion, this swinging, this quiet  
search, and all we can do is let go  
and hope that we won't land, that our aproned mothers  
won't step out onto their tired balconies, brushing aside  
the curtains of laundry, yelling that dinner is ready.



## Poem for Frank O'Hara

Moon, I need to let these things or words  
escape and talk loudly at you  
since no one else is here right now pretending  
to not know about our rotten birth and death  
pretending to not know that it is I am  
we are stupid—so I'm sorry,  
I'm not convinced anymore  
or even fisted with enough tough  
hair on my knuckles my intimately brave chest  
my white completed life  
that brings me to this or that and then maybe sex  
but I'd rather sit here and watch your light  
coming to me from a spot in the sky's face  
where you are big to yourself  
though I'll never know or care except this once

because it's sad—I just found out my loneliness  
and do you know? it is similar to my mother's  
skinny pale feet which I dread and dread  
and can't forget any longer until finally  
she puts on her socks and I vow to leave  
even though I never will and thus distances  
tickle us toward each other as brothers  
of silent conversations and the inability to shake hands

V. PENELOPE PELIZZON

## On Receiving a Sketch from the Artist at the Midpoint of Her Journey

Crows love a day like this:  
a lemon sky with pines  
growing into it, some branches  
losing their needles. Pale  
hills, an indefinite horizon.  
It has not rained yet.

Toward the bottom left-hand corner,  
symbolizing Abundance, Truth, Faith  
in the Human Animal's Ultimate Good  
despite a universe of sulfurous clouds,  
—or perhaps simply crystallizing  
along green and grey diagonals everything  
the artist at the instant of sight had been,

runs a stream.

When you got into your car,  
I wasn't watching.  
Where you are while you are  
driving is not on this map.  
How long you travel depends  
on your priorities: scenic observation  
or direct routes; a reverence  
for color or for line.

## Landscape in Polychrome

History is the record of a culture  
as defined by colonists  
who paint exteriors: a house  
with pale stucco walls, a verandah,  
terra cotta tiles. In late afternoon  
before bats begin trapezing,  
bells ring the angelus. It's  
peaceful here after the long walk,  
and if you take off your hat and sit  
in the shade of the ginko by the rainbarrel,  
a barefoot woman will bring a tray with a glass,  
a pitcher of cool water, two lemons, and a knife.  
She slices translucent disks of lemon  
one by one into the glass  
and covers them with a trembling  
skin of water. You put it to your lips  
and drink. You are not thinking:  
once this glass was sand.  
You're thinking how quiet it is here,  
how perfect for contemplation,  
not a soul around.

## Still Life

*"I want to astonish Paris with an apple" — Paul Cezanne*

An apple might be  
about to roll off  
a plate, milk  
to spill. The plaster  
wall might  
pleat like  
a fan;  
ginger dust could hang  
in the air for days  
after the shards  
of jar were picked  
from the rubble.

The table, encouraged by the drape, is inching toward you.

# Morning Poem

What is solid?  
Is afternoon a solid thing?  
Should the world drop from under  
me what would I clutch?  
Would it be an afternoon  
of green heat on Skinner's Butte,  
you and your bicycle one animal  
running beside me?



DEBORAH REPPLIER

## Faded Blues

I wear your death  
like a pair of jeans—  
three summers ago they clung  
tight, zipper threatening  
to burst, now baggy  
and worn, tears  
in the knee they fit me  
not comfortably, but  
I can breathe

DEBBIE REYNOLDS

## ABUSE

In the swirling black crayon train  
smoke are groping leather hands.  
The picture hangs trapped between  
mismatched kitchen magnets, and a dirty  
yellow refrigerator—ignored, like your  
stained pillowcase, and your black  
crayola worn to a stub by the smoke.  
Father feeds the fire—his edges scrape  
across your skin. Tiny, crooked wheels  
hover on the trackless page, and you  
can't leave the smoke behind.

HEATHER SHELDON

## Observations by the Ocean

### I

Rubens' women dream,  
sinuous curves coiling  
in deep sea blankets;  
undulating swells dissolving into spume,  
hissing into grit shores.

### II

My hands become the petrified wood of elk's antlers  
slowly baking in the sun.  
I could have been standing in the desert.  
But the wind cupped my ears with distant shell songs.

### III

An unaffected tide wanders into cushioned marshes;  
sea seeping suckling beds feed the young.  
Weaving sea grass children flutter speech  
to the unseen Mother.

### IV

Light imbues my skin,  
an open plain,  
with salt to dry my skin to bones.  
So I too, can be a dolmen,  
a lone guardian,  
to the tide.

DANIEL STERNE

## Is the Dream Working

I try to get a job by dreaming.  
Wake at 7:00 a.m.  
go back to sleep. Dream  
I have a job, sleek as a cat. Each  
morning my briefcase leaps into  
my hands. Breakfast in my belly, I'm  
ready to roar.

Outside it's bright as summer.  
Push the accelerator. I realize  
it's all a dream.  
Lock the car door, take off my clothes  
and get back in bed.

They say you move forward by inches.  
Just waking up is enough for today. Next  
week, make a breakfast of oatmeal, stand  
in front of the mirror and talk to yourself.  
You look like a rabbit, nose  
twitching, paws shaking, you end up  
going to the bathroom to calm down.  
Back to bed, ahha. Books and the heat  
make me feel pregnant, a whole 'nother  
life to share my bed.

I read, and take my temperature, it's  
always below normal.

Eventually I go out for the mail,  
weeks of it jammed in the mailbox. Letters  
from friends urging me to call. A man writes  
he wants to interview me. In a panic  
I dress in my blue suit and umbrella.

He offers me a job as an investment banker.

Why me? Why do I have to be chosen? Like  
a cell on a slide.

He holds a syringe  
saying: "Now I must  
draw out your dreams."

PATRICK SYLVAIN

## Adieu Miles

Poetry is my father  
dancing on my eyelids  
like a drunken butterfly  
sometimes it is my mother  
crying for the rhythm of her youth  
waving melancholic blues.  
When the music stops  
my son one winter old  
stops swaying like bamboo  
and looks at me dead  
in the eyes  
as if life ceases to love  
a surrealist's paintbrush stuck  
in cubic holes  
and my blood flows  
lifeless forms.  
After hours of surfing  
on musical waves  
I slide into my CD player  
in electronic dreamscape  
to meet with blazing horns  
and strumming bass  
I stumble onto a key  
and the man with the horn  
turns his back  
and walks away  
his trumpet falls  
and blows tears.

# Passage

A folded paper boat navigates  
the red white and blue sea  
in moonlit night  
yesterday's dream fades  
into iron fences and locked doors  
a string of solemn faces  
stare at bare walls  
hawk eyes whose language  
stays nose deep  
speak without moving  
their upper lips  
their words bleed ears  
memories of yesterday hammered nerves  
solemn faces pour their hearts  
to coffee cups  
and drink tears.



SONDRA UPHAM

## At My Father's Casket

This is not my father—  
sandcastle gray  
and still as a stick—  
though the shoulders are broad  
and the hands look strong  
enough to skin a rabbit,  
to cut it down the middle  
and dig the buckshot out.

Who cares if my mother and grandmother  
have bowed their heads here?  
I can't be fooled.  
I know his smell, remember it  
on the inside of his patrolman's hat,  
the band damp with sweat.  
How many times did he set it on my head,  
take off his badge  
and pin it to my shirt?

Let the rest of them cry—  
I will look for him  
in his cruiser or at Pete's Cafe.  
He may be there  
drinking black coffee,  
passing time.

chris west

## Gen de Colour

I and I work hard  
hard and time long, you know  
de man 'im sit fat on we back  
sugar in every ting he do  
sweet banana bread best rum  
and smile 'im teeth when  
comin', checkin'  
de boy Nigel birth  
who eyeballs green, you know  
we do de jump up so shy  
look to dirt and rock, not sky  
mudder shame and proud, both way  
her chile gone be foreman  
hole de whip

# seasons worlds apart

you would walk out when  
I played that music I don't  
listen to anymore      you

CHRIS WRIGHT

## Dream Fishing

You are outstretched   your edges  
curled like a leaf   Across your skin  
the sun has dappled its thin float  
Your mouth hints at a smile  
with faint lines   its frame rising  
Are you dreaming of us   thick  
with the rich cast of shadows  
allowed to be?   I watch you  
breathe   your pale breast's  
smooth ascension   The dark nipple  
taut skin over ribs   Slowly  
afraid I should disturb you  
I pull white sheets down  
cross your knees   and press my mouth  
against your stomach   along the ridge  
I feel you writhe beneath my touch  
I taste you   and the claret  
of night   of all places dark  
seeping into me   Your hands clasp   Your  
breath grows short   Your dreams  
tugged from their lull by the pull  
of the senses   at last  
come to me

# It's No Place For a Poet

He was so sensitive he fell dying  
watching the sun go down

The sun dropped and so did he  
bleeding everywhere  
and sobbing into a white  
handkerchief "it's so bloody  
beautiful!"

I wondered if I should tell him  
before he slipped away  
that maybe it was just the Iron Works  
making the sky so

# Plague

Give me a proper death.  
All the things you knew about courage  
were never real. I want to go  
with a bang. You know,  
shot by the Secret Service  
for trying to look up the Queen's  
dress. That would be quite funny,  
a proper death. I would not want to fade  
in some hospital bed, bleeding  
into uncertain tubes. Rather  
to be sat on by an elephant  
until my eyes popped out. That would be  
a proper death. I would not want  
to sit it out with some  
dull disease. Rather that my head  
was blown clear away  
by a faulty cannon. I've seen  
Wile E Coyote die a thousand times.  
It's a bloody good time.  
And a damn sight funnier  
than Albert Camus.

# Sunday

Sunday  
on the sofa  
junked on tea  
what a pig of a day  
it's got mud in its eyes  
got every tiny bead of life  
scattered like bugs exposed  
to sudden light  
I'm picking my feet and  
flicking little bits of me  
across the carpet at the TV  
I've eaten five hundred slices of toast  
and drunk five hundred cups of tea and  
the paper's grubby pages  
strewn across the floor  
like yesterday's news  
like yesterday's fun





Toru Nakanishi



Heidi Cope



Heidi Cope



Toru Nakanishi





Toru Nakanishi

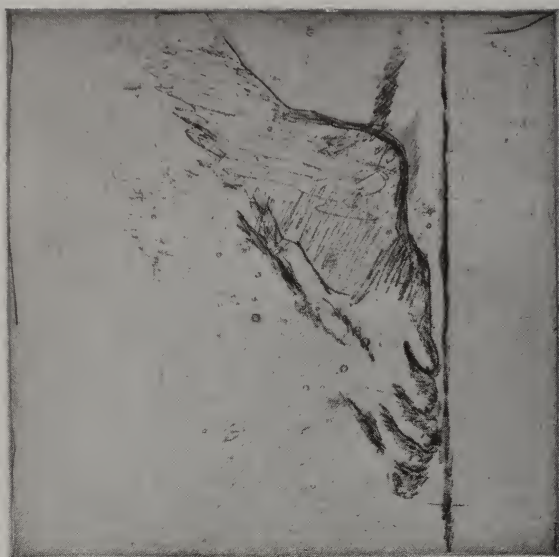


Toru Nakanishi



Toru Nakanishi





August 1912 3.27.92



## Veterans as Students— a Sound Investment

"It's fun to teach G.I.'s. I should know. I've taught three varieties of them—the post World War I student, World War II's government sponsored G.I. and last but not least, the servicemen from the 'police action' in Korea!"<sup>1</sup> This was F. Fraser Bond's comment in his article in *The American Mercury*, December, 1958. Veterans by their very involvement in the military have learned pride, discipline, teamwork and the need for commitment. Whether they volunteered or were drafted, they served our country in a time of need; regardless of who determined the "need." I believe, as the President and Congress did more than forty years ago, that educating veterans is a sound investment.

After World War II, the American Legion and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt acknowledged that a GI Bill given to war veterans was a good thing for the country, the economy and the veterans. Encouraging veterans to go back to school to complete their high school education, to learn technical skills in vocational schools or to attend college, not only benefits the veterans and their families, but also pays dividends by creating citizens who contribute to the tax base and overall welfare of the country. As a result of their military training, veterans generally are more mature than post high school non-veterans. Referring to the GIs of World War II, F. Fraser Bond wrote, "They were in school, most of them, to learn all they could in a short time...[and the] typical GI class of that period had a listening intensity that kept the instructor on his toes...[and further that these] students had maturity and often the responsibility of wives and children."<sup>2</sup> As such, many veterans display a desire to take the steps necessary to advance their personal growth and enhance their opportunity to get ahead in life. The veterans' maturity contributes significantly to their completion of the educational programs they pursue.

In all types of educational environments—General Educational Development (GED High School Equivalency) programs, vocational schools and colleges, we see veterans who display the pride, discipline and teamwork they acquired in the military. These veterans are committed to the educational goals they have established for themselves. Veterans understand the need to make sacrifices in their personal time and family responsibilities, will work a part-time job rather than a full-time job, will attend fewer social

activities and defer other areas of interest in order to attain the education they feel will ultimately lead to better employment opportunities and more fulfilling lives. In an article written in the October 29, 1966 issue of *School and Society* entitled, "Continued Evaluation of Veterans' Careers as a Function of Education," the authors wrote, "the correlation between years of schooling and income remains consistently and impressively high. The role of other special education beyond formal education is raising occupational levels and improving income prospects seems even more evident."<sup>3</sup> We therefore owe it to the veterans, as well as to the business community and to the Federal and local governments, to encourage them to take advantage of educational opportunities to improve their employment and economic potential.

With regard to Vietnam veterans, a study conducted in Massachusetts discovered the following:

The William Joiner Center's follow-up investigation into the status of Vietnam and Vietnam-Era Veterans indicates that, far from diminishing, the...economic and educational problems faced by Vietnam and Vietnam-Era veterans are becoming more acute....<sup>4</sup>

... As an **increasing** number of Massachusetts' Vietnam Veterans seek to improve their educational status, federal and state funding for veteran's educational programs and financial assistance is **decreasing**.<sup>5</sup>

... historically Vietnam and Vietnam-Era veterans have made good use of the GI educational benefit.... Since for almost all Vietnam and Vietnam-Era veterans, GI Bill Educational benefits expired in 1989, those veterans seeking to continue their educations are left to depend largely on state programs.<sup>6</sup>

Over the years veterans have obtained financial assistance from various sources—the GI Bill, veterans' tuition deferment plans, educational loans, scholarships, grants, family loans, and other available options. Currently, the veteran has the Veterans' Education Training Program at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, Harbor Campus, available at no cost to the veteran. The program offers: College Preparatory Courses, GED, Academic and Vocational Counseling, and Tutorial Support Services. This program provides an excellent, structured curriculum which helps the veteran get back into an educational environment.

In the VETS program, veterans are instructed and guided by veterans who are committed to assist, encourage, instruct, counsel and direct the veteran students in their pursuit to successfully

complete the programs they have chosen.

Throughout their education, either by direct contact with their counselors, instructors and special tutors, or correspondence mailed to their residence, veteran students are reminded of their hard work, the sacrifices being made by them, and the time they have invested in themselves and the program. Encouragement is regularly given to each veteran student to continue.

The commitment and dedication of the VETS Program administrators, instructors and tutors is evident. To them, each veteran is of utmost importance, as is the veteran's successful completion of each course.

Upon completion of the Veterans Educational Training Program, veterans are prepared for their next challenge—a technical education, college or employment.

To each of my fellow veteran students, I'd like to say that I hope you are successful and happy in your quest, whatever it may be. To those veteran students who shared their knowledge to help me through the confusing moments, I offer my sincere thanks. To the administrators, instructors, tutors and consultants who made this educational opportunity available and who helped direct me through it, I am deeply grateful for your efforts.

Lastly, here is my message to the federal, state and local governments: respond to all veterans' needs. Encourage them! Assist Them! Support them! Educate them! Listen to them! Veterans contribute much to the success of our country and economy, as well as to our tax base.

Are veteran students a sound investment? You bet they are!

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<sup>4</sup> Camacho, Paul R., Bowen, Kevin J. and Hunt, David, *From a Troubled Past to An Uncertain Future: Vietnam Veterans, A Community at Risk*, Five-Year Follow-up Report On the Status of Vietnam Veterans In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1991, 2.

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ROBERTA GUILLERM

# NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

As an important area of organizational communication, nonverbal communication has fascinating implications for instruction. This essay explores the history and theories of nonverbal communication and discusses significant implications of nonverbal communication for the instructional designer, teacher and trainer.

## NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTION

Communication—the creation and exchange of messages—is a complex process which has been and continues to be a subject of significant research and analysis. The area of verbal communication—that which uses written or spoken words—has been studied for centuries. The area of nonverbal communication, however, was relatively uncharted territory in this country until the 1950s.

Ruesch and Kees were among the first to explore nonverbal communication through their book, *Nonverbal Communication—Notes on the Visual Perception of Human Relations*, in 1956. The book explores nonverbal communication through the analysis of photographs of people and material objects, and is considered by the authors to be a simple introduction to the field of nonverbal communication. The work lacks in-depth scientific analysis, but is significant in that it was reprinted seven times up to 1970; and it most likely led to an increased interest in researching nonverbal communication by other researchers of a more recent era including Birdwhistell, Ekman, Goldhaber, and Mehrabian. The book concludes with a chapter entitled “Toward a Theory of Nonverbal Communication,” in which the authors state that, in broad terms, the language of “nonverbal communication falls into three categories: sign language (gestures or signals which replace words); action language (body movements which are not used exclusively as

signals); and object language (displays of material things, including the body and clothing).”<sup>1</sup>

Following the in-depth studies of several nonverbal communication researchers, Goldhaber, in his text *Organizational Communication* (1990), presents a paradigm for organizational communication as the interaction of people and messages within a selected environment; within the paradigm, each of the three key components—people, message, and environment—generates its own unspoken messages. Goldhaber presents his three dimensions of nonverbal behavior in an organization as: the body and its behavior and appearance (face, gesture, touch, posture and shape); the message voice (volume, tone, rate, pauses and nonfluencies); and the environment (space, time, architecture and seating arrangement and objects—including clothing).<sup>2</sup> To recap, current researchers have expanded upon Ruesch and Kees’ view of nonverbal communication to include manipulation of the voice, as well as the building environment, two very important aspects of nonverbal communication in my experience. I would propose to Goldhaber that clothing might be considered as one aspect of the “body, behavior and appearance” dimension as an alternative to the “environment” dimension; however, regardless of the specifics of classification of nonverbal behavior, the research is fascinating and the implications of research findings are important to organizations as well as to educators.

Ekman said in “Communication Through Nonverbal Behavior: A Source of Information About an Interpersonal Relationship” (1965) that nonverbal behaviors can repeat, substitute, complement, accent, regulate and also contradict verbal signals. Mehrabian said in *Silent Messages* (1971) that when a nonverbal message contradicts a verbal message, it will probably be the nonverbal message that is believed, as nonverbal expressions convey feelings and can outweigh words and determine the total impact of a message. Researchers believe that the majority of the impact of a message comes from the nonverbal, as opposed to the verbal, aspects of the message. It is important to be aware that the validity of verbal messages are checked by nonverbal actions, and that the nonverbal message is dominant. With Ekman’s and Mehrabian’s observations in mind, I will use Goldhaber’s organizational schema as a basis for discussion of current nonverbal research findings and their implications for instruction.

## GOLDHABER’S THREE DIMENSIONS OF NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR: IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTION

### 1) The Body, its Behavior and Appearance

Our body language—facial expression (mouth and eyes), gesture, touch, posture and shape—communicates our feelings and attitudes. Ray Birdwhistell developed and tested a system to observe, record and classify the movements of the body from moment to moment. His famous book, *Kinesics and Context* (1970), describes his theory that body movements, or kinesics, constitute a language much like a written or spoken language, with the ability to provide the equivalent of a verbal sentence or paragraph.

The face is often the most visible indicator of our feelings, yet one of the hardest to measure because the face can convey several emotions at once; and also because, while we often display emotions unintentionally through facial expression, we also consciously keep many facial expressions such as smiles and frowns under control under certain circumstances.

Instructors use their eyes to give recognition and feedback, and to maintain control over students. Eye contact occurs to signal an open communication channel, to convey a desire for inclusion, and to acknowledge when people are seeking feedback. Teachers should be sensitive to the eye contact of their students. In "Importance of Teachers' Nonverbal Communication" (1987), Crawford states that eye contact increases teacher credibility, and she recommends that a teacher try in each class to make contact nonverbally with each student through eye contact. A teacher noticing wandering eyes of a student during an exam can usually correct the situation with a stern gaze.

Eye contact is said to be absent when people want to hide their feelings, where there is tension, or where an individual no longer wishes to maintain social contact. Students avoid eye contact with a teacher to avoid opening channels of communication if a question posed by the teacher is too difficult to answer. One facial signal which we cannot consciously control is pupil dilation. An instructor may wish to be aware that an individual's pupils dilate when looking at something pleasing, and will constrict when looking at something displeasing.

Nonfacial body movements or gestures are less readily controlled than facial movements, and can "leak" emotions which the face does not. Hands communicate a great deal of expressive information, especially in conjunction with verbal language. Touch can give encouragement or show support. Physical attractiveness is believed to enhance initial credibility. Hairstyle, cosmetics, jewelry, and clothing may send messages about our identity and character, social status and occupation, and may also affect our attitudes about ourselves. Teachers need to be sensitive to the role they play in modeling appearance for students.

The teacher needs to be aware of the possibility of sending and

observing mixed messages, as well as cultural differences in body language. A teacher must view nonverbal communication in the total context of a situation, and not as an isolated segment, and must avoid putting too much emphasis on any single nonverbal cue.

## 2) The Voice

How we say what we say can convey several different meanings to our audience. Vocal cues, or paralanguage, include such variables as volume, tone, rate, pauses and nonfluencies, and are responsible for judgments of many characteristics such as age, height and weight, as well as personality traits, education, interests, emotions and attitudes, and ethnic and dialect group, in addition to status and credibility. Knapp and Mehrabian assert that messages received from vocal cues often overpower verbal messages as cues to the speaker's intent. As indicated by Goldhaber and Davitz, differences in vocal intonations express different emotions ranging from anger to boredom to joy to sadness.

According to Miller, paralanguage is a powerful tool which can readily affect student participation:

Consider a classroom situation in which the teacher asks a question and calls on one of the more talented students, who in turn answers the question correctly. Generally, the teacher responds with some positive verbal reinforcement enhanced by vocal pitch or tone, expressing the acceptance and liking of the student's answer (often accompanied by a smile or other forms of nonverbal approval). In the same situation, if the teacher called on a less talented student whose response was incorrect, not only might the teacher verbally reject the response, but he or she might also modify the future responding behavior of the less talented student because of the accompanying vocal cues.<sup>3</sup>

## 3) The Environment

Goldhaber's third dimension of nonverbal behavior is the environment. Environmental influences related to nonverbal behavior include space, time, architecture and seating arrangement, and material objects. The study of how we communicate in relation to interpersonal space is known as proxemics. People are comfortable only when communicating at the appropriate interpersonal distance. Four distances are used for different social interactions: intimate (physical contact to 18"); personal (18" to 4');



social (4' to 8') and public (12'+). Teachers' conversations with students usually fall into the latter three categories. Teachers should be aware that invasions of intimate space can create anxiety and stress, and also that proxemics is another area where intercultural differences exist.

Time is another major nonverbal environmental variable, according to Goldhaber. As he says, Americans treat time with great respect, especially in organizations (where "time" = "money"). An important implication of time for the instructor as well as the student relates to tardiness—consistent tardiness communicates a nonverbal message that class is not a priority. Or, if an instructor indicates verbally that he or she is willing to answer questions in class, yet constantly lectures past the class period and does not allow time for questions and answers, a mixed message is being communicated. Again, time is another area where intercultural differences exist. The study of time and how we communicate through the use of our time is called chronemics.

The instructor probably has little influence on building structure, but can make a difference in his or her own classroom with regard to the environment, including decorations and seating arrangement:

The implications concerning fixed-feature spatial environments for today's classrooms are obviously important, considering that students spend about six hours a day, five days a week, forty weeks a year in these learning environments. Clearly, the physical classroom environment can create moods and establish how much interaction (communication) takes place.<sup>4</sup>

Studies have shown that learning is facilitated more by a bright and pleasant environment than by a dull and depressing environment.

Some ways to enhance social interaction in the classroom include creating a quality visual-aesthetic environment and arranging the furniture for students' maximum view of the teacher and other students. It has been noted that most participation in classrooms comes from students seated in the center of activity and directly opposite the instructor. Students choosing to sit closer to the teacher are perceived as more attentive, likeable, initiating and responsive than students electing to sit away from the teacher. Students also often develop territoriality by the second day of class, often sitting in the same seat they occupied on the first day of class. As a final word on classroom environment, a teacher should be aware that the location of his or her desk has the potential to act as a spatial barricade which may prevent students from entering the space

around the desk, thus inhibiting interaction with the teacher— so a teacher should consider carefully the nonverbal message which he or she may be sending by the location of the teacher's desk.

The instructor should consider all of these environmental variables—space, time and room environment—in order to create the most beneficial learning environment possible for his or her students.

## CONCLUSION

It is very important that the instructional designer, teacher or trainer be cognizant of the nonverbal communication within the classroom environment as a part of the total communication process, for the validity of verbal messages are checked by nonverbal actions, and the nonverbal message is often dominant. The instructor's awareness of the importance of nonverbal communication through body language, paralanguage and the environment is essential to quality interactions between the instructor and his or her students, as the instructor must send appropriate nonverbal messages and must respond appropriately to nonverbal messages received from the students.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.20.

## The Room

In the late Seventies, young gay men started coming down with a mysterious disease, which was later identified by the acronym AIDS. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome has caused havoc on the gay community and its sexual and social behavior. At this time, more than 75,000 Americans have died from AIDS, and estimates put the number of those that have been infected with the HIV virus in the millions. The public scare over the disease has turned to hysteria and the conceptualization of all this fear was to scapegoat homosexuals.

In 1981, an awareness of AIDS was beginning to show up in the alternative press. The first article I can remember was one that appeared in the *Boston Phoenix*. The article ironically predicted that, with changes in behavior and diet, the at-risk population could become the healthiest in America. The attitude of the media and public during the early stages of the disease was child-like; the innocence was soon to turn into vicious adult paranoia.

I followed the developments of awareness of the virus in the news media, trusting them to keep me informed. I didn't expect to become directly involved in a disease that was quickly becoming the nation's largest public health crisis.

Then, after returning home from a late dinner, April 29 1986, the apartment I was sharing with some friends was raided by a state police task force. I was sentenced to three to five years in Walpole State Prison for possession of a class B substance. I ended up in a prison system that was struggling with questions of how to handle the AIDS epidemic.

The first inmate with the AIDS virus I encountered was a young man in the Southeastern Correctional Center, commonly known as Bridgewater, an antiquated prison that was made famous by the documentary

"Titticut Follies." When C. B. attempted to have his sentence reduced, his attempts were thwarted—an early indication of the type of stance the state was taking. The state tried to implement a mandatory testing policy, but was unable to follow the federal government's lead.

All inmates attend a classification process and are regularly put through classification boards. In the past these boards were used to

determine if an inmate was adjusting, but with the new developments brought on by AIDS, it became clear that the state wanted to identify and monitor its homosexual population. Members of the prison administration use the classification board as a tool to control and manipulate men.

My problems with the classification department began when I was admitted to Concord State Prison. With less than a year to complete my sentence, I was expecting a move to a lower security facility. These hopes were forever lost after I had a particularly senseless fist fight. At the disciplinary hearing, I was found guilty; the members of the board sentenced me to two weeks in the "Hole," or isolation cell. This time was to be spent in total darkness. With less than a year to go, my time took on a whole new outlook. It was the beginning of a series of many visits to Holes which spanned three prisons and almost took my life.

After my release back into the general population, the administration, lead by a woman who I dubbed "Nurse Ratchet," made plans to send me to the "Room." The Room is a brainwashing cell used to change men. In the Room, they try to force men to admit their homosexuality and submit to AIDS testing. Similar programs have been used by the federal government, but were abandoned because of the high rate of suicide.

The evidence against me consisted of: my correspondence with a friend who is gay—our letters consisted of academic subjects, but his were signed "love, Jon," and my participation in two primarily gay groups, the church choir and the prison college program. What angered me most, however, was that Nurse Ratchet talked of anatomical evidence as proof of my sexuality, like the length of my eyelashes and my build. This behavior by a state official only strengthened my resistance.

The population started to get into the act. This became dangerous and caused several violent encounters. I steadfastly refused to cooperate with a policy that I felt was another invasion of my rights. I felt the state had no business classifying men's sexuality, as long as they weren't promiscuous or a health threat. I fought back with a speech delivered from the church pulpit entitled, "No Man Shall Hinder Me." It raised the men to their feet and it brought the battle of wills between me and Nurse Ratchet to a head. I had lost my job in the Mill and couldn't buy extra food; I was losing weight.

At Christmas, Pastor K. talked of the sacrificial lamb. That night I went down to the gym to box in an attempt to assert my manhood and preserve my masculinity. I took a terrible beating. Bloody and with swollen eyes, I stepped out of the ring. As I washed the blood off my face, I overheard someone say to the other fighter, "Why did



you work him over so bad?" His reply? "I gave him back his manhood." I didn't know I'd lost it.

I was constantly getting called down to fight. If I didn't go, it would mean that I was gay. They were trying to break me; the effect of this was a weakening of my health. I was on Dilantin as a preventative measure against seizures. I was forced to take it for a serious head injury I received when I was jumped one night. Once while waiting for my medication, I overheard the guards say, "He's leaving here in a box." The harassment against me continued into January.

At approximately 12:30 pm on January 16, 1990, I got into a fight in the dining room. I was again charged with disrupting the institution and sentenced to the Hole. I needed the rest that the Hole offered, but I feared for my mental health. I had become so weakened that I had a hard time walking. Two weeks after my release back to the block, with around-the-clock pressure from the guards and administration, I feared for my life. My mail was being intercepted and I was denied access to the phone; I was unable to reach my lawyer. I finally reached the outside and got help. A priest demanded that I be moved to another institution. He saved my life!

Stripped and chained, I was thrown into a van and transported to M.C.I. Norfolk. This medium security prison has an air of finality to it, and rightly so. Men are sent there to do long sentences. For that reason they have nicknamed it "The Warehouse." The state chose a fitting location for their clandestine operation.

At the receiving center in Norfolk prison, the nurse took me off Dilantin. It was something I'd been trying to do myself; it was my theory that I didn't get along with the medication. They couldn't send me out into the population, nor did I want to be, not until I regained my strength. I was sent to an isolation unit that housed homosexuals and AIDS victims. It is in this unit that they have the "Room," where Dr. Q.'s techniques for brainwashing are put to use. Dr. Q. is a professor at a prestigious university, whose methods were abandoned by the federal government, but adopted by the state in their war on AIDS. I spent the seven longest days of my life there.

The guards walked me down a long corridor lined with vault-like steel doors. They had small windows about five feet up and a slot at waist level for feeding. I remember that it reminded me of a submarine. This was to be my new home. We stopped three quarters of the way down the hall. I had arrived. The guards unchained me and performed their usual humiliating body check. As I bent over to the command, "Spread your cheeks," I got my first look at the Room. The floor was dirty and the cockroaches scampered under the bunk at the abrupt intrusion. The bed was steel and it was bolted to the wall, and in the corner was a toilet with

a small sink on top. The room smelled.

When I stood up, I saw a broken window with a grate on the outside. This concerned me because it was February and I saw no blankets. I prepared myself for a cold night. This was my first encounter with the cold room/hot room method of testing the body's resistance to illness. It was to be used later at another prison, in a Hole they call the Fort. The door closed behind me and the light went out. I heard the guards laughing as their footsteps grew faint. I got down on my knees and prayed.

The first night, I heard people talking directly underneath me. I recognized one of the speakers as Nurse Ratchet and the other speaker was a man whose voice I had heard outside the Hole back at Concord. Nurse Ratchet was screaming, "This bitch has AIDS and I can prove it, you hear me! You fucking bitch!" This type of verbal abuse continued throughout the night. The man said, "You haven't been wrong yet, but you better be right or it's the end of the AIDS squad"—I assume that's the title they had given themselves. They had followed me, and I had fallen into their trap.

In the morning, the battle intensified. They played tapes of music, trying to observe and judge my reaction. When they played "Walk on the Wild Side," by Lou Reed, the guy in the next cell said, "Don't sing along, man. If you do, they'll never give up." It was one of the few times that I heard an inmate speak there, even though the place was full. When I called her Nurse Ratchet for the first time, she went off the wall.

Finally, after three days of psychological torment, we were told that, after lunch, we could take a shower. The lunch was particularly big and included chocolate chip cookies for dessert. Then they called showers. The first man was a tall slender black man. As I watched him walk by, I remember thinking that his eyes looked like those of a deer, facing a hunter's gun. A few minutes passed, then the guards started yelling, "He shit all over himself," and laughing about him as they brought him back down the hall. The man cried out, "Don't look at me! Please don't look." I honored his request and got down on my knees instead. I was next.

As the guard led me to the shower at the end of the hall, I couldn't help noticing the men peering out of the darkened cells. When he uncuffed me, he told me that there were no towels, just pieces of bed sheets, and told me to discard them afterwards in the barrel provided. There was a camera in the shower room, just as there were cameras everywhere.

I discarded my shorts and entered the shower, the water felt so good and I proceeded to relax as the hot water beat against my back. It all seemed so surreal that I had ended up here. Suddenly, the water turned ice cold, and I jumped at the shock. Stepping out of

the shower, I began to realize why so few men had signed up for one. I became angry and grew militant in my thoughts.

That night as I lay in my bunk watching the snow fall, my mind raced and my thoughts returned to my youth when kids used to chase me, calling out, "Day by day. David's gay," a take-off on a song from the play *Godspell*, which was popular at the time. As I recalled gangs of youths chasing me and taunting me with a word that I didn't understand, I wondered how a homophobic person like Nurse Ratchet was put in a position to effect the lives of gay men. I became angry at people like her, who blame AIDS victims for their own terrible disease and deprive them of dignity in their most vulnerable time. Then I remembered my friend "Bobby," who was killed in a highway rest stop. Because he was hiding his sexuality, I didn't know he was gay, but I did know that he was my friend. When I tried to talk to other people that knew him, they would say, "He was gay," as if that fact justified his murder. Late into the night, I wondered, "Is this persecution going to end?" In the morning I arose defiant. Every day, about ten minutes after breakfast, a train could be heard in the distance. That morning, I began to sing, "People get ready a train's a-comin'. You don't need a ticket, you just get on board." Then the whistle could be heard. I used it as my cue for battle. I started yelling, "Get me a phone. I demand a phone call." By lunch-time, my efforts were rewarded. A sympathetic guard brought me a phone; by this time, some of the guards didn't believe I was sick, and they felt that what the administration had been doing to me was wrong. I found it necessary to tell my family everything. They promised to get in touch with my lawyer and to come up for a visit.

The next morning, my mother and one of my brothers showed up at the prison. They couldn't believe how bad I looked. I had lost so much weight that my mother cried. They asked me if I had AIDS—this facility was maximum security, and signs warning visitors of AIDS were everywhere. I proceeded to explain why I wouldn't submit to testing. I told them how the prison officials had treated us like animals, and how I believed that they were trying to feminize—psychologically castrate—me. I explained to my mother how the officials had never questioned me, face to face like a man. Instead, they used methods of coercion. That angered me the most. If they had explained in a rational manner what they wanted, all this trouble might have been avoided. But there I was in prison for an illegal act, and the administration had been acting illegally, trying to force medical tests on inmates.

Back in my cell, while waiting for my lawyer, I wondered why people find it easy to mistreat the sick and the dying. I couldn't help thinking of the Nazi persecution of those they felt were inferior. I

watched scared, thin, gay men move about the hall. I thought, "Why does the administration assume that I'll spread the disease? Do they think that I'm that socially irresponsible?"

The stereotype they hold of gay men is so archaic. I can't believe they still hold it.

Finally, my lawyer arrived. I explained to him what had transpired, and how it had all started with a fight. I told him about the trips to the Hole, the sleep deprivation, the psychological torture. I told him how they had insisted that my life was a lie. As I spoke, I became aware that I smelled sour and that I looked like death. He said, "You have to get to a safe place to get an AIDS test." He continued, "I'm going to visit a guy, a powerful guy here. He's my friend." He went on to say, "Listen, Dave. Remember his name. Get to him." When he left, I didn't touch his hand. He kept his hands in his pockets.

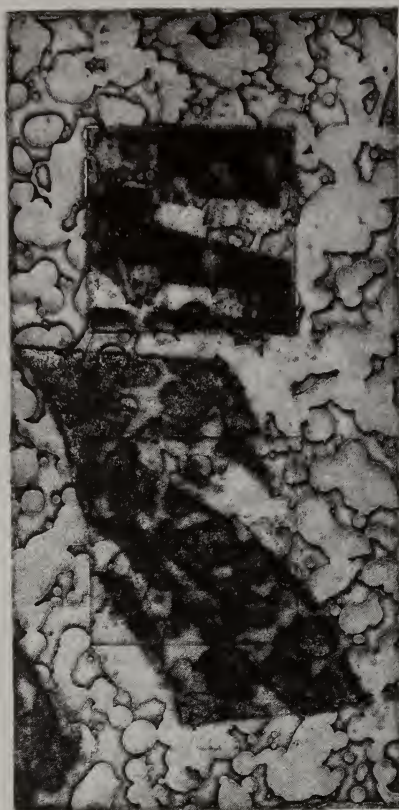
It wasn't long after I returned to my cell that all hell broke loose. I heard people yelling, "Let him out." I went to the window and group after group of inmates came as close as they could to the building, pointing up to me and saying, "Look. There he is! They broke his glasses!" I smiled and a tear rolled down my cheek. Downstairs, my "observers" didn't know what to do. The men in the yard all stood facing me and pointing. That night they came and moved me to another prison.

My views on life were forever changed by my experience. Four months later, June 6, 1990, I was released. A free man. I have gained back the forty pounds I had lost during my ordeal. And one month later, the results of my AIDS test came back positive.

*Editor's note: This story is solely Mr. MacMasters' version of his prison experience, and does not reflect the opinion of this publication.*

"positive" should read "negative"





M. HANSTON '12



*"Still Life #2"*  
Thomas Meadows

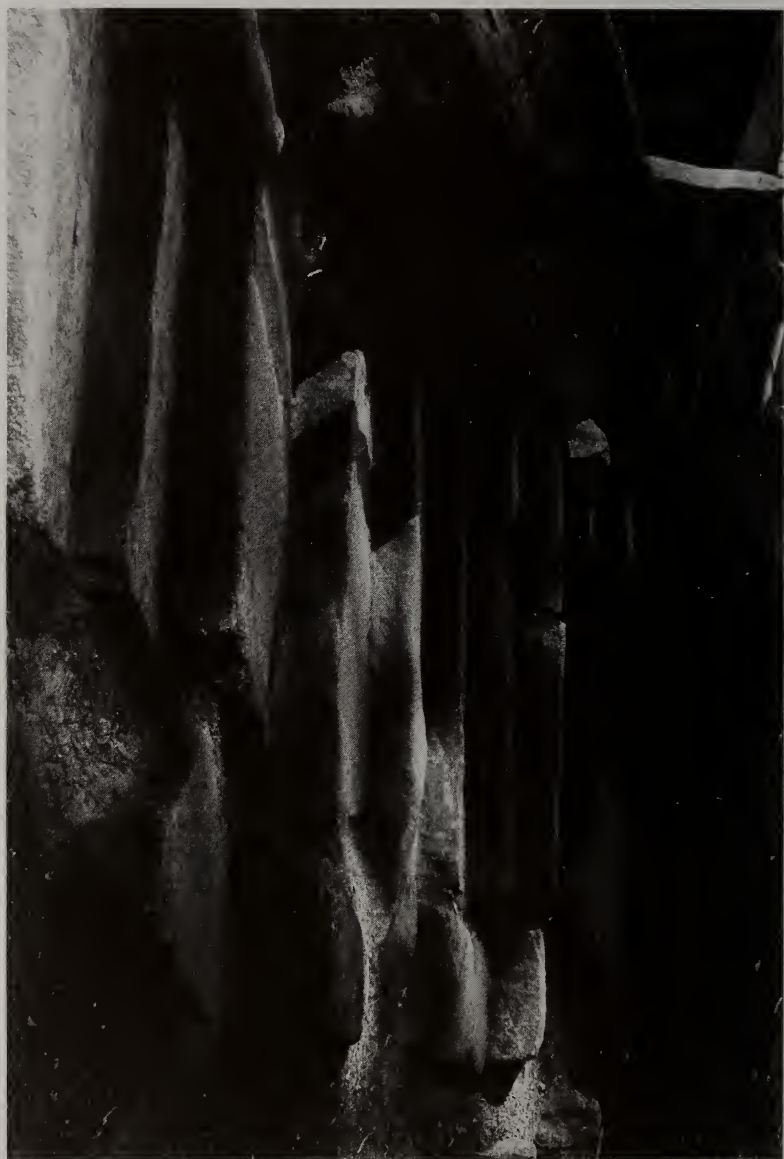


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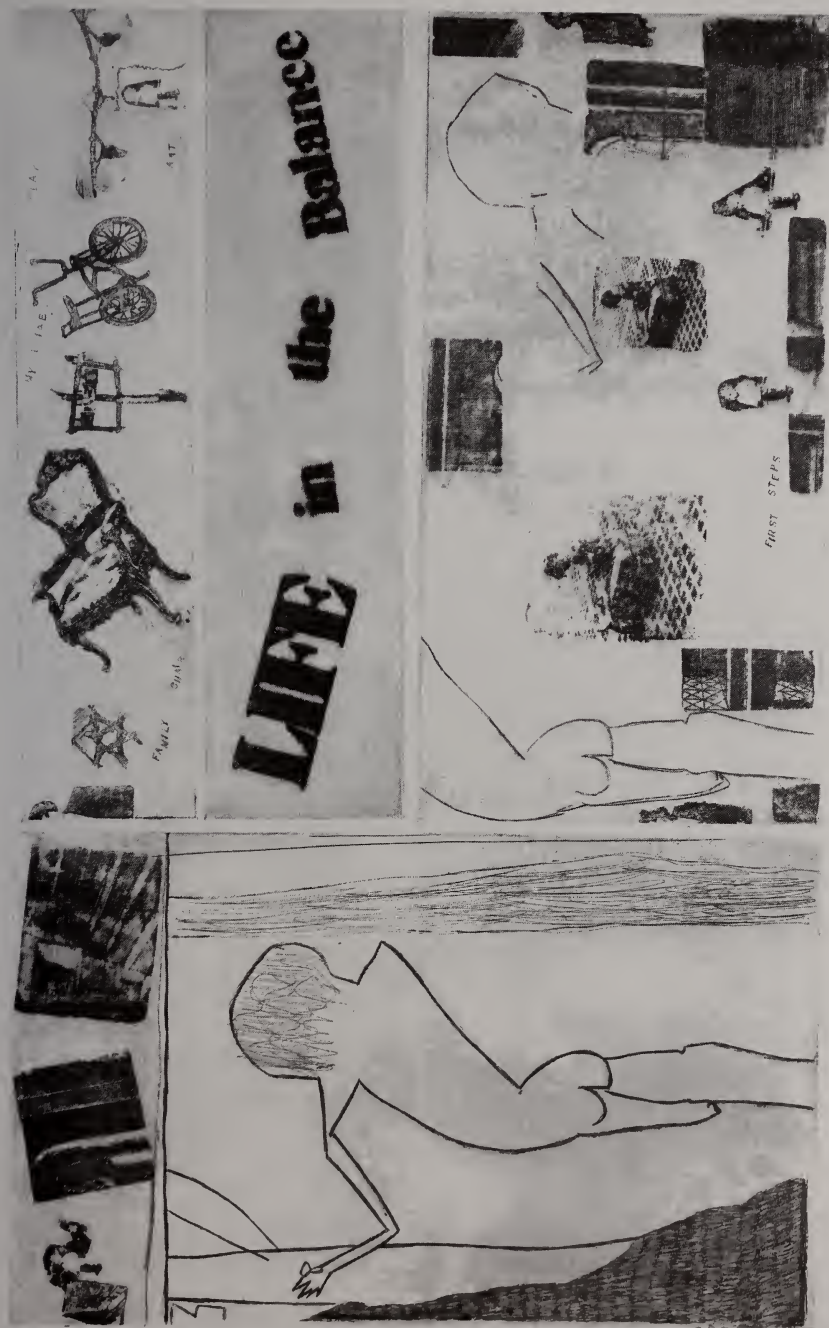




*Mary*  
Stephen Abbot



*The Stairs*  
Susan Kane



*Life in the Balance*  
Jackie Fuchs





Thomas Meadows



Richard Foley



ERIC C. BEEMAN

## Marrying Mikayla

"I have a confession to make." Jeff told Beth on the phone. He hadn't spoken to her in three weeks, since returning from his trip to New York.

"You do? What?"

Jeff wondered whether Beth thought he was going to tell her that he loved her or that he didn't.

"I'll tell you tonight."

"What do you want to do?" Usually Jeff had well thought out plans. Bike rides, Brazilian cafes, pancakes in Maine. It was all new.

"I don't know." He paused and the phone was silent. "I guess the winter's got me fresh out of ideas." This was not the truth. He wanted to go ice skating in the city at night.

"Food's always good," Beth said.

"Food's always good," Jeff smiled and gave the phone a quick chuckle.

"So we'll eat."

"We'll eat."

"So I thought of the first half of the date," Beth said, "now you think of the second half."

"Okay." Jeff maintained a humored tone.

"Okay. Bye."

"Bye."

Jeff and Beth had been dating for four months. They went on four dates before they had sex, and both claimed that was the longest they'd ever waited.

Jeff forgot that he really did like her. He put his head on the table when he hung up the phone. He didn't want to be that nice or to smile. The side of his mouth rested on the cold white plastic table top. Thoughts ran through his mind of what to say to Beth.

There had been too many lies. He felt worse about the lies than having to break up with Beth. He craved honesty but exercised none. Sometimes he wasn't sure what he had told her, and he had to double back and tell it again. He was starting to think she wasn't so smart and that made him like her less.

Nervous, and wanting just to blend in, he told lies to his co-workers. When Beth started working there he couldn't change the story just for her.

Truthfully, he had said that he had been in a six year relationship and they had lived together in another city for three years. Truthfully, he explained how he moved out because he wanted to complete his own education and progress professionally—the two things he couldn't do with his "ex."

The lie was that the relationship was with a woman; it was with a man. That was the easiest lie. Jeff imagined that Beth, who said she loved him, would forgive this lie. It was a fertile lie and it propagated dozens more.

"I don't have any," Jeff lied when Beth asked to see pictures of his former girlfriend.

"None?"

Jeff tried to rationalize the nonexistence of photographs for a six-year relationship. "She kept them, she has everything we had. I just walked out—I didn't want any." He had a drawer full of Mike photos.

"What part of her body did you like the best?" Jeff rolled over in the sheets laughing at the question asked quietly in bed. "What part of *my* body do you like the best?" Beth asked. Jeff rolled back onto her and laid his head on her breasts.

One day Jeff found himself spelling the female name he had assigned to Mike when he told half-truths about him. There was no love in the name Mikayla. Vomit crept into his throat.

Driving to New York he saw his own reflection in the rear view mirror. He only had to get as far as the Mass Pike to see what was behind him. Home was a mural, one he painted. It was absurd. he wondered where he got the paint to make such pretty pictures.

For the first year ever, Jeff had a date for the annual Thanksgiving football game, a woman to show. In the supermarket he ran into his parents' friends. Instead of talking about his brothers, saying things like, "Brad is a doctor, his girlfriend's a nurse. Larry is in the air force; he's been dating the same girl since high school," he said, "I'm back in town to finish school. I'm dating a woman named Beth." People at work treated the two of them as a unit. The men laughed at his sex-on-the-beach stories, and the women cooed when he left roses on her desk. The world loves a man and woman. The race goes on!

Jeff loved the thought of kids, of being a father. What would he teach his kids? Jeff asked himself deep into Connecticut. How to lie? How to make people feel uncomfortable in the supermarket. His ego was in love. Egos cause wars.

In New York he saw Mike. He still loves Mike. When they sleep together all the elbows and knees and chins fit. Souls touch; Jeff had forgotten that.

"Move back to New York!" Mike commanded.

Jeff did not move. He wanted to finish school, and clearly he couldn't do that with Mike.

On the ride back home, Jeff concluded he would end the lie with Beth. He'd also move out of his mother's house, where pictures of other people's grandchildren hang on the refrigerator.

At seven, two hours after their telephone conversation, Jeff was sitting next to Beth in a restaurant booth.

"So, Beth."

"Yes." She knew it was confession time.

"In New York, I realized—" Jeff paused; his eyes circled the menu unfocused. "I realized that I'm still in love with her."

Beth said, "Oh," indifferently.

"And after I finish school, we're going to get married."

"I think that's very good for both of you."

"I'm sorry I led you on, I didn't—I didn't realize—"

"No, Jeff, really...it's okay. I always knew there was something on your mind."

"You did?"

"Yes. Thanks for being honest."

TAMARA BOUCICAUT

## WAR GAMES

Nicky crouched and rested his back against the alley wall. He held his weapon upright, by the tip, spinning it between his fingers, stopping occasionally to chew on the end of the plastic barrel. "We should be safe here," he said.

Jane was breathing too hard to answer, just looked at him in his flashy soldier gear and shook her head in agreement. They could hear the others firing and yelling around the block. The battle was raging.

"We'll probably be the last ones left," said Nicky.

"My side always loses," said Jane.

"Not today." He smiled.

"But we're missing everything."

"That's the price we pay for victory," he said in someone else's voice.

Jane laughed even though it wasn't that funny.

"You really like this stuff?" he asked her then.

"Yeah. Why not?" She knew what he meant.

"Well, you know, I don't see any other girls around here."

"So what? I'm sure some of them want to play. They get embarrassed."

"Why aren't you embarrassed?"

"This is a stupid conversation. Why did I have to get stuck here with a stupid person?" Jane asked.

"Forget it," Nicky said and concentrated on his gun, killing ants with the heel.

They sat in silence for a moment and listened to the war.

"Everyone always bothers me," she said, more to herself than to him.

"Because you're pretty," he mumbled.

Jane played with the zipper on her jacket.

"You're dead! You're dead!" The voices from close-by and far away drifted into the alley.

"I wonder how many are left?" Nicky asked.

"Maybe just us now."

The alley grew a little darker. Nicky stopped smashing ants. They became very aware of just the two of them there. Nicky cleared his throat and pulled a pack of gum from his pocket.

"Want some?" he asked.

"No. I hate gum."

"Oh," he said and put the pack back without taking a piece.

"Want a kiss?" he suddenly blared out.

Jane didn't answer, just stared at him with her mouth hanging part way open. Nicky stood and moved toward her.

"Okay?" he asked, seconds before he lightly pushed his mouth against hers. Then he stood back and looked right into her eyes.

"Okay," Jane said and her first kiss turned into her second.

And then: "Nicky!" A voice rang out and broke the spell. The alley filled with soldiers, soldiers who weren't supposed to kiss.

## Flea Market Dreams

Jackson Edwards strode up to the jam-packed table, thumbs hooked casually into his front pockets, head slightly turned away from the merchandise... better to look like you didn't really want any of it, all this junk. He let his eyes rove over the potpourri of household items: old toys, books, even clothes hung forlornly on the portable rack. Bunch o' sad lookin' stuff. He scanned the mismatched dishes, spotted a kewpie doll with its pursed red lips and molded plastic curl that looked like it dated back to the forties... could be worth something, he thought. He glanced back along the way he'd come to see if he could find his wife, but she'd disappeared somewhere over near that woman who had all those pots and cooking stuff.

Jackson always kept his eye peeled for assorted fishing tackle that he sometimes came upon at flea markets. He had quite a collection, he did. Been fishing most of his life, and had all the right equipment. The guys knew who to call if they needed somethin', yup. Lettie was always on his back about buyin' so much stuff. "What do you need all those things for?" she'd whine. "You never catch anything. We could use the money for stuff we need." Sure. She'd spend it all on curtains or hair ribbons for the girls, if she had her way. 'Real' important stuff. She'd never understood the way a man needed his time away with his pals to fish or hunt. Women. They could be a drag.

He had perfected a quick flickering study of each table, dismissing most of the items at a glance but able to zero in on the good stuff pretty quick. He thrust his chest out with a studied air of shrewdness and made a deliberate step past the table, like he hadn't seen anything that caught his eye. He had all the time in the world on a nice day like this. The sun was going to be out all day, warming things up to a comfy sixty-five or seventy. Perfect. He was reminded of that deodorant commercial, what was it for, "Never let 'em see you sweat." He was a pro at these things, that's for sure.

"Help ya, Mister?" the vendor inquired, leaning forward a little too eagerly.

"Nah, don't see mucha what I'm lookin' for," he replied, pretending not to notice and stepping back in front of the table casual-like just to take a better look, careful to ignore the glimmering



fishing lure half-buried under some pot holders. "Whadda ya askin' for this here Rapala? Took a twelve pound bass in Quabbin with one like that. Wouldn't mind havin' another."

"S'worth about seven bucks in the store. I'll let it go for four-fifty."

"What the hell you take me for, lady, a sucker? They've got those things down the line for two-fifty. I ain't gonna pay four-fifty for it." Jackson let a moment pass. "I'll give ya two seventy-five." Jackson knew how to talk to these people. They sat around behind their collapsible tables all loaded up with all the stuff they couldn't wait to clear out of their cellars and garages, and tried to make you think like you were getting a bargain if you bought it off 'em. The women were the worst. Thought that you'd give them the askin' price if they just smiled pretty at you. Shit. Why should he take their junk? They should be paying *him* to cart the stuff away. He didn't need any of their cast-offs. This "All Sales Final" crap really got him, too. Everyone was putting out signs like that these days. Like they were afraid you'd discover what a piece of junk they'd palmed off on you.

The vendor wrinkled her nose a bit before coming back with "Four," but Jackson fingered the four one-dollar bills in his hip pocket, the remainder of this week's budget money, and figured he could probably walk away with the Rapala and a dollar if he played the game right. Lettie couldn't bitch too much if he kept enough to buy the milk they'd run out of this morning. She wouldn't even have to know he'd spent the three if he could get the broad to sell the lure before she showed up. The table was loaded with stuff; it didn't look like much had been moved all morning, and the vendor seemed pretty eager to make a sale.

"Three," Jackson countered. He loved this. This honey wanted to sell that lure in the worst way, and Jackson had her right where he wanted her. "Three dollars and not a penny more. So much used fishin' stuff around here today, I think I'll just..." He was playing this cookie out just like a prize-winning bass at a state tourney.

"OK. Three," the vendor huffed, obviously unhappy but unwilling to miss the sale, "but all sales are final, remember." She bagged up the silver multi-hooked beauty and swapped Jackson for the bills that he held forward smugly in his right hand. Jackson loved to win.

"Jackson!" Lettie's shrill voice cut through the flea market drone. "Jackson, where the hell did you go? I told you to stay where I could see you." The vendor lowered her head and looked up from under her eyebrows at the tidy little woman storming their way. Jackson's face clouded over and he slipped the bundled lure into his cardigan pocket, patting the lump as flat as he could make it.

"Jackson Edwards, where's that money I told you to hold? That lady over there is holding a coffee pot for me for the next five minutes and I have to have it. You know how bad mine is. This one's like new. Only askin' three dollars, Jackson. Gimme." The vendor busied herself with rearranging a pile of Dr. Seuss books, pretending not to listen.

"Lettie," Jackson croaked, "Lettie, shut up, will ya? Come on, let's go..."

"Jackson Edwards, what have you been doing here, as if I didn't know. Lady, did my husband try to buy anything here today?" Lettie set her face in a glowering mask aimed at Jackson. "Jackson, where's my money? Lady, if he's given you any of that money, he's going to have to undo the sale. Jackson, you know that money is for the budget. Get it back. Now."

"Shit, Lettie, I can't 'undo the sale,' like you say. See the sign? 'All Sales Final,' fer chrissake. Let's get out of here, can we?"

"Look," Lettie leaned toward the vendor, flashing a quick, apologetic smile, "look, Jackson here wasn't supposed to spend that money. That money is for the budget—you know budgets, doncha? Men, I'm tellin' ya! Go without milk before they'd go without their toys. We gotta get a new coffee pot onna count of ours is broke, and ya can't go along without any coffee in the morning—ya know?" The vendor remained unmoved. "Look, Lady, I have to have the money. This is the only chance I'll get to find a coffee pot for a price we can afford. Please, let Jackson swap ya back for his money. It'd be different if we had extra money for whatever it is he bought from you, but that four dollars is all we have until the end of the week, and I've been saving up extra so's we could come down here today and find a pot and that lady said she'd hold it for five minutes and...." Her voice trailed off in a tone of soft desperation.

Jackson cast his eyes to the ground and worried a tuft of grass with the toe of his right boot. He thought of the bride he'd married eight years ago, all fresh-faced and smiley. He thought of the broken coffee pot and the taste of whole wheat toast without the smell of Chock Full O' Nuts. He fingered the silver Rapala in his sweater pocket.



## Tent Dresses

Rita sighed and shoved the last handful of chocolate chips into her mouth, then drained a can of cola to wash them down. She set the timer on her remote control TV and snuggled down in bed, ready to watch the rest of the Thursday night movie and then the news. One hand snaked out of her warm cocoon and reached for the chocolate chip bag. Maybe there was one more left. Soon after, she dozed off.

There was a sharp scream, and Rita shot up in bed, panting in fear. Adrenaline pumped through her veins, and she could feel her heart pounding in her chest.

"In local news, a sixteen year old girl was killed in a hit-and-run accident this afternoon. Authorities are searching for clues . . ."

Rita emerged from the tangled blanket, groping for the remote control. She clicked the TV off and took a deep, even breath. "He's not here," she told herself. "He can't be here. He doesn't know where I am, and he wouldn't come here even if he did."

She settled back into bed and pulled the blankets up around her neck. It was a long time before she fell asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was upstairs, and she could hear it advancing down the hall with a rhythmic gait: thump, drag, thump, drag. She looked frantically around the hallway for a place to hide and, left with no other choice, she crouched under the piano in the corner.

It was almost at the top of the stairs.

She knew that it would find her here, but she didn't know what else to do. There was nowhere else to hide. It would find her. Then she saw a doorway that hadn't been there before. She could hear it thump onto the first step, and she made a desperate dash for the door.

The room was empty except for a bed which was exactly in the middle, almost as though it were on display. She tried to wriggle under it, but it was too close to the floor and she was too fat. There was no closet, and no way out except through the hallway. Whimpering in desperation, she climbed on top of the bed and pulled the blanket over her head. She lay there, shivering with fear,

waiting.

It came closer. She could hear it entering the room and progressing slowly towards the bed: thump, drag, thump, drag. It reached the bedside and paused. She was paralyzed with fear, wanting to run, to escape, but unable to move.

It ripped the cover off of her and she screamed. It was wearing a hideous mask, the distorted face painted with violent gashes of red and purple, the mouth leering, the eyes narrowed in an evil squint. It reached up and tugged off the mask.

It was her father, and he was laughing.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rita woke up the next morning, depressed and with a headache, like she always did after the dream. She thought about calling in sick, but decided that being home alone with nothing to do but wallow in her depression was not a good idea — so she took three aspirins, swallowed a cup of instant coffee and dressed in her uniform whites, dashing out of her apartment so that she wouldn't be late.

Just as the elevator doors were about to close, the door to the apartment next to hers opened and a woman called out, "Hold the elevator, please!"

Rita pushed the 'open door' button and waited impatiently for the woman to fumble with her keys and lock her door. She hurried into the elevator, smiling her thanks and juggling her purse, two shopping bags, and an armful of balled-up clothes.

"Thanks so much. I usually take the stairs, but with all this stuff to carry I just thought the elevator would be easier," the woman said, trying to shove her keys into her purse.

Rita shifted uncomfortably. "That's all right," she said. She noticed all of a sudden that the woman had what looked like a black eye. Trying not to stare, she watched the floor numbers as they lit up: 3, 2, 1. The door opened and the woman got out first, smiling apologetically. Rita followed slowly.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You know, Rita," Susan said as she changed the suction nozzles, "I think this is it. I mean, really, how much does he expect me to take? I don't care if he was drunk and didn't know what he was doing. We're engaged, for crying out loud. I don't want him sleeping around!" She slammed the dental chair into an upright position for emphasis.

Rita continued removing the bit from the drill's hand-piece and

wiping off the dried blood and bits of tooth with a square of gauze soaked in alcohol.

"I'm tired of giving him chances," Susan continued. "Besides, it's not like I couldn't get anyone else. Last week, when Maria and I were at the mall, two guys tried to pick us up when we came out of the lingerie store. And I told them I was getting married, for Christ's sake! Can you believe it?"

"Well, I guess. I mean, nothing like that ever happens to me."

"Oh, come on. Guys never try to pick you up in the mall and stuff? You're young. You're healthy. And if you'd let me help you style your hair and put on some make-up, you'd look cute. Not that you don't look fine now, it's just . . ." Susan faded off into an uncomfortable silence.

"That's OK Sue. I don't really want to pick up guys in malls. I do just fine on my own," Rita said, turning her crimson face away.

"Is there a problem, girls?" asked Dr. Feeney, peering at them over the tops of his glasses as he entered the room.

"No sir, no problem," Susan stammered. She quickly finished cleaning up while Rita bustled out to the waiting room to get the next patient, relieved that she didn't have to listen to Susan any longer.

Later, over lunch, Susan tried again. "You know, Rita, a few of us are going out tomorrow night. We're going to see a band at a new club over on the Avenue. Why don't you come with us? It would be a lot of fun."

"I don't think so, but thanks anyway. I wouldn't know what to wear, and I don't know much about music like that," Rita said through a mouthful of tuna sandwich.

"Come on. We could go shopping after work tonight. Really, Rita. I'd love to help you pick out some new clothes," Susan offered hopefully.

"I can't. I'm supposed to go to a tenant's meeting in my building. They're going to discuss whether or not to demand carpeting for the lobby. I really need to be there," Rita lied.

"Oh. Fine. I just wanted to help. I thought it would be fun." Susan sounded slightly offended.

"I'd love to some other time," Rita said, trying to make amends. "Maybe we could go to the symphony or something. I love seeing all those people, dressed up and laughing. And the music is so beautiful. We could do that. Maybe next month. All right?"

"Sure. The symphony. Sounds like fun."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was stuck again. Rita cursed the landlord under her breath as she thrust her bulk against the lobby door. It gave suddenly and she almost fell through, banging her head on the door frame and knocking into a person just coming around the corner.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Rita said, trying to right herself and her unfortunate victim at the same time.

"It's OK. I just lost my breath for a minute. Are you all right? I think you're bleeding."

"I'm fine. Really. Thank you," she stammered, wiping her hand across her forehead. It came away wet, and she wondered where to wipe the blood.

"If you want to come up to my apartment I can clean that up for you. I think we're neighbors. I'm Fay. Fay Martin. My husband and I just moved into the building two days ago."

"I'll be OK, but thanks anyway. Oh, I'm Rita Stephens. It's nice to meet you." She offered her hand, but quickly drew it back when she remembered that it was smeared with blood. "Sorry," she grimaced. "I have to go deal with this. I'll see you around," and she rushed down the hall towards the elevator.

"Maybe we can have coffee or something," Fay called out as the elevator doors were closing. Rita didn't bother to answer. She leaned her head against the back wall of the elevator and tried to staunch the trickle of blood sliding down her forehead.

'Sure,' she thought, 'let's have coffee. Then you can tell me all your problems, and I can sit there and nod and smile and say how terrible it all is. That's all I need is one more person to play Mother Confessor to.' The elevator stopped and she got off, tripping because the elevator always stopped short, never lining up quite right with the floor of the hall.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Rita? Is that you?"

"Who is this?"

"It's Stuart. Stuart Taylor. Don't you remember me?"

"Of course I remember you." She paused, shaken by the sound of his voice. "How did you get this number?"

"Your mother gave it to me. I ran into her at the store last week and mentioned that I was coming into the city for a meeting. She gave me your number and said that I should try to get in touch with you."

"Why would my mother want you to get in touch with me?"

"She just wanted to know if you're OK. She's worried about you, Rita."

"I'm fine. You can tell her that I'm just fine. And if that's all, I'm



really busy right now so I have to go." She picked at a piece of lint on her grey sweater and then cursed under her breath when it pulled and began to unravel.

"No! Wait. I'd really like to see you. Can we meet tomorrow, say around six o'clock. Please, Rita. I've missed you."

"You've missed me? It's been more than five years since I left and you never got in touch with me before. Don't you think it's a little late to be missing me?" Rita took a deep breath to calm the hysteria rising in her voice. She noticed that the porcelain wall clock had stopped at 1:30. The batteries must have run out.

"Look. I have to leave tomorrow night. I'm catching the nine o'clock shuttle, so there isn't much time. I just want to talk to you. Catch up on old times, let you know what's been going on. Stuff like that. Please, Ree?"

"I don't know. I guess. But just for a little while."

"Terrific! I'm staying at the Holiday Inn. Meet me in the bar at six?"

"OK. I'll be there." Rita hung up the phone, wondering what she'd gotten herself into. She wandered into the kitchen and put the kettle on. Opening a box of chocolate cookies and stuffing two into her mouth, she thought about her relationship with Stuart.

They had started dating just after New Year's of their senior year in high school. Stuart lived two houses down from Rita, and they had known each other all their lives. When he had asked her out the first time, she was so surprised that she agreed without thinking. Later, though, she had time to question his motives. 'Why would he want to date me?' she thought. 'No one in his right mind would want to go out with me.' Examining her reflection in the hall mirror, she didn't notice her startlingly green eyes, or the way her wavy brown hair framed her round face. She only saw the zits on her chin and the roll of fat around her middle that her loose clothing couldn't quite hide.

"Hey, Ree-ree," her father said, walking up behind her and grabbing her arms. "Who makes your dresses? Omar the tentmaker?" And he squeezed her tightly enough to make her eyes water, then wandered off down the hall guffawing.

Stuart and Rita had dated a few times, and he finally convinced her that he really did like her. It was hard for her to believe, but after a while she managed to gain some confidence in herself and in their relationship.

One night, they were sitting in Stuart's car in front of her house. It was after midnight, and they figured everyone was asleep. Stuart was trying to convince Rita that it was OK — they were in love, so it was all right to have sex. Her shirt was half undone, and she was caught up in so many unfamiliar and even frightening feelings that

she could hardly think at all. Suddenly, the passenger door opened. Rita, blinking in the glare of the overhead light, struggled to pull her blouse together, trying to see who had opened the door.

"You slut!" her father screamed, grabbing her shoulders and pulling her from the car. "You filthy whore! I work my ass off to buy you food and clothes and to put a roof over your head, and how do you repay me? By screwing every horny Jew who wants to stick his hands down your pants. You bitch!" he yelled, his beer-soured breath making her nauseous. He smashed her across the face and threw her to the ground. "You whore! You're just like all the others! I can't believe you'd treat me like this, after all I've done for you." He started to cry as he picked her up and hit her again. He stumbled, tripped, and fell to the ground, sobbing. Stuart was out of the car, trying to help Rita up. Her mother came running from the house.

"What's going on here? What happened?" she asked, clutching her robe together, her make-up-less face strangely barren and expressionless in the glare of the porch light.

"Mrs. Stephens. I don't know what happened. One minute we — then he — Oh, God. What's happening?" Stuart was almost in tears, tugging at Rita's torn sleeve, trying to make her stand.

"Go home, Stuart. Just go home," Mrs. Stephens said in a calm voice. She knelt at Rita's side. "Rita will be fine. She'll see you at school on Monday. Go home." She moved to her husband's side and helped him rise. He was still sobbing uncontrollably. "Come along, Rita. Help me get your father inside. I think we've given the neighbors enough to see for one night."

The whistling of the tea kettle snapped Rita out of her reverie. She shuddered, trying not to remember. The rest of the school year had passed in a blur. Her father had a heart attack several weeks after the incident with Stuart, and her mother spent all of her time nursing him. Rita stopped seeing Stuart and her other friends. She went to school, and when she wasn't at school she watched TV and ate constantly, fantasizing about how wonderful it would be when she got away from this place. Her mother was so busy taking care of her father that she didn't even have time, for once, to criticize Rita for the weight she was putting on.

Rita left home the day before graduation, and received her diploma in the mail. She hadn't returned since. She had spoken to her mother a few times on the phone, and then they had written a few times, but Rita finally decided that it just wasn't worth the effort. That was five years ago. It was hard to imagine why Stuart — or her mother, for that matter — would want to talk to her again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rita and Fay met in the elevator again the next morning. "Hi," Rita said, smiling vaguely in response to Fay's greeting.

"Where are you off to?"

"I'm on my way to work. What happened to your arm?" Rita asked, noticing a huge bandage wrapped around the other woman's wrist, and then immediately regretting the question as Fay paled and turned away.

"I burned myself on the stove. It's not serious."

"Oh. I hope it's OK." They maintained an uneasy silence as they walked to the subway and went inside. A train was just pulling into the station and they both ran to catch it, Rita struggling to find a subway token at the bottom of her oversized purse. She pushed through the turnstile, and she and Fay got on the train just in time.

They smiled awkwardly at each other, and took the only two seats left. Rita sat uncomfortably, trying not to squish Fay on her left so that Fay wouldn't notice how fat she was, and at the same time trying not to sit too close to the old woman on her right who was humming quietly.

A couple seated across the aisle were kissing and fondling each other, and Rita stared. They broke apart for a second — presumably to catch their breath — and the man caught Rita's eye. He stared at her for a second, winked, then grabbed the girl's hair. Pulling back her head he paused, stuck out his tongue and plunged it into her mouth. She sucked at it, moaning, and Rita felt a shiver travel down her spine, feeling repulsed and excited at the same time. She turned away and saw Fay watching the couple, too. They looked at each other, blushed, and looked in opposite directions.

The old lady seated next to Rita suddenly burst into a somewhat shaky rendition of "The Star Spangled Banner," scaring Rita so much she almost slipped off of the seat. "Oh, say can you see . . . you fucking assholes, shit . . . By the dawn's early light . . . eat shit, shit, shit," the woman belted out at the top of her lungs. Rita wondered if the woman was really crazy or only pretending. Where does someone draw the line? What would it be like not to take responsibility for your actions, not to have to worry about your emotions and feelings anymore, to just let them loose?

Rita was relieved when the train arrived at her stop. She smiled an awkward goodbye at Fay, and practically ran off the train.

\* \* \* \* \*

'Why am I doing this?' Rita asked herself that evening as she paused in front of the hotel. She smoothed the tan dress that covered her bulging flesh and wondered if Stuart would notice how



much weight she'd gained. Sighing, she thought, "There's no way he really wants to see me. I can't imagine what we'll talk about. But maybe he does want to see me . . ." She cringed as she realized how little she, or anyone else in their right mind, would want to rehash old times, but she entered the hotel anyway.

She was early, so she sat at a little table in the back of the bar and looked at the menu, wondering if she could order some french fries and eat them before Stuart arrived. Then he was there, and she was so flustered at seeing him again that she forgot all about eating.

"Rita," he said, squeezing her hands and kissing her cheek. "It's really wonderful to see you. You look terrific."

"Cut the bull, Stuart. I look like shit and we both know it. So why don't you tell me why you wanted to see me, and we can get this over with. If you were looking for a quick roll in the hay before you go home to wifey then I'm sure you've changed your mind by now." Rita shifted in her chair, appalled to hear these words coming from her mouth, but powerless to stop them. Even as she said them, she hoped that he really was there just to see her and talk to her. She hoped that he had missed her.

"Of course that's not why I'm here. I really did want to see you. No, Ree, I wanted to know how you're doing and all that stuff. I've worried about you for a long time, after what happened and all. You'd never talk to me about it, and then you left. Are you happy now? Is there anyone special in your life? Can't an old friend just stop by to say hello?" he asked, resting his hand over hers.

"Don't call me Ree. And we didn't exactly part as friends. You never tried to get in touch with me after I left home, so excuse me if I find it difficult to believe that you just wanted to say hi." She pulled her hand away from his.

"OK. I can see that you're not going to make this easy, so if you insist, I'll get right down to it."

"I insist," Rita said, her heart sinking. He really hadn't come just to see her. He had some other reason.

"Your mother asked me to talk to you, Rita," he said, then cleared his throat. "Your father is really sick, and she wants you to come see him, to make your peace with him. She knew you wouldn't answer her calls or a letter, and she couldn't leave him, so she asked me to come and talk to you. She thought I'd be the only one you'd listen to. What do you say, Rita? Will you come home?" he asked, smiling hopefully at her.

"I am home. This is my home now, and I'm not going back to that place for any reason. Especially not for him!" Rita's voice had risen, and the couple at the next table looked over at her. Rita paused for a moment. She rearranged the silverware on the table in front of her and then took a sip of water. "Why should I go back

there? To grant him absolution for what he did to me? To forgive him so he can die feeling superior? That man almost ruined my life! He's an abusive drunk. He never let me have a moment's peace the whole time I lived under his roof, and I'll be damned if I'll help him die any easier!" Rita sat back in her chair, stunned by the anger and fear dredged up simply by talking about her father.

"If you won't do it for him, Rita, won't you at least go for your mother's sake? She needs you now. She needs to know that you still love her, and that she can count on you now," Stuart pleaded, his eyebrows knit with intensity. "She hasn't been all that well, either. They both need you."

"I can't believe this. Don't you see? She blamed me for everything. She always held me responsible for what he did. Somehow or other, it was always my fault. Do you know, one time he got drunk and started to scream at me about a grade I got in a class. I told him I didn't think it was any of his business that I'd gotten a C since he never paid any attention when I got A's. He got so mad that he ripped the stove right out of the wall and tried to throw it through the kitchen window." Rita paused and took a deep breath. She noticed that Stuart had a few wrinkles next to his eyes, and that the dimple in his chin was just a little deeper than it used to be. "The next day," she said more calmly, "when my mother and I were cleaning up, she blamed me. She said I provoked him. But I didn't. I swear, I didn't. He didn't need to be provoked. He didn't need any excuses. You know what he was like when he was drunk, Stuart. You saw him. But he only had to shed a few tears the next morning, say he was sorry and promise not to let it happen again, and she'd be all smiles and happy again. Her perfect little marriage. I'll be damned if I'm going to lift a finger to help either one of them." The people at the next table got up, the man casting an accusing glance in their direction while he held the woman's coat.

"Well, if that's really the way you want it to be. I mean, I understand if you're angry, but he's still your father. After all this time. Are you sure you won't reconsider?"

"I'm sure."

\* \* \* \* \*

It came in the mail a week later. Rita read the newspaper clipping and the note over and over again. "I can't believe you wouldn't come and say goodbye to him," her mother had written. "He was right about you. You are an ungrateful daughter. I can't believe you didn't come. Now it's too late." Rita crumpled the obituary into a ball and threw it across the room. It hit the photograph from last year's calendar of a swan gliding serenely

across a lake. She climbed into bed and lay there, staring at the cracked wall. She felt dead inside. Nothing.

\* \* \* \* \*

The phone woke her; she yanked a pillow over her aching head to shut out the noise, groaning into its softness.

"Rita? Where are you?" Susan asked through the answering machine. "Aren't you coming in today? Dr. Feeney is really pissed that you're late. Oh, well. I guess you aren't there. Call me and tell me what's going on."

She lay there, her mind unable to grasp the reality of the situation. Dead. He was dead, and she'd never been able to tell him what she thought of him, never been able to make him sorry for all that he'd done.

Rita spent the day shuffling around the apartment, her hair a nest of snarls, her robe gaping open around her waist. She ate everything she could put her hands on. Chili straight from the can, a box of saltines, half a pound of cheddar, a half gallon of double fudge ice cream. By nightfall the apartment was a shambles, wrappers and empty containers everywhere. Rita tried desperately to sleep, her aching stomach not even beginning to compete with her aching mind.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bang! Rita jerked awake.

"Fuck you, you bitch! I'll teach you to try to screw me around!"

She couldn't figure out where the noise was coming from, but as the crashes continued she realized that it was the Martins next door. Rita was disoriented, squinting as she tried to read the time by the trickle of light coming through the curtain from the streetlight. Then it all came back to her, and she collapsed on the bed, moaning softly to herself.

There was more banging, and she tried to ignore it. It came again, louder this time. The sound filtered through her misery until she realized that it was someone pounding on her door. She crawled out of bed and stumbled through the living room.

"Who is it?" she asked, catching herself on a table in the short hallway as she tripped over something in the dark.

"It's me. Fay. Please let me in." Rita could hear her sobbing through the door. She unlocked and opened it, and Fay grabbed her arm.

"What's wrong?" Rita asked.

"Oh, thank God you're here. I know I don't know you. I mean,

that you don't know me, but — oh, please, just let me in!" she pleaded, her eyes wide with terror and her hands desperately gripping the worn sleeve of Rita's nightgown.

"What happened? Are you all right?" She drew Fay inside and closed and locked the door. The sick feeling in her stomach grew stronger.

"He's lost it. Totally. He tried to kill me," she moaned. "You've got to help me, please. Help me!" she cried as she collapsed into a sobbing mass.

Rita began to weep silently. She knelt in the dark and hugged the other woman close to her soft bulk.

DEREK GENTRY

## A Story About Aaron

Meat loaf, the post-card said. That was why I didn't open the other thing right off: I was so absorbed in the meat-loaf recipe and the fact that it had come from Boise. On the back, a humongous potato dwarfed the truck carrying it and an arm waved from the cab. Finally I set it by the stove and made a note to add the first pin in Idaho, the next dot in a design that already incorporated Arizona, California and Oregon.

So I looked back at the other thing. This handwriting I didn't recognize, though the envelope, post-marked from San Something, California, was addressed with implied intimacy to my first name only. I say I didn't recognize the writing, but I had this feeling, you know? Before I even got it open and saw the crumpled bit of green inside, I couldn't help thinking of this kid who weaseled a dollar out of me when we were twelve.

Aaron, whose last name I still can't remember, lived two houses down and definitely was not my best friend. He wasn't even really a friend at all, more an acquaintance, but I probably wouldn't have said "acquaintance" when I was twelve, so maybe that wouldn't be a good word. In fact, a lot of the time Aaron and I hated each other's guts, so I don't know...he was just so weird, you know? His house smelled funny, foreign like teabags or something. But when neither of us could find anybody else, we'd hang out together.

Aaron was a little taller than I was and pudgy, with shaggy black hair always hanging in his eyes like he'd swiped it from a sheep-dog. And he was always coming out with things like that, saying he'd done things that shocked me both for their daring and for their apparent aimlessness. "I snuck my Dad's electric razor and shaved the dog's head," he would've mumbled, hands pushing deep into his pockets. I don't know. What do you say to that? He'd just lay it out there and not explain anything and then he'd flip the hair off his forehead. He was constantly doing that, like he had a muscle spasm or something. His whole head would jerk and for a minute you could see his eyes, dark and confused like a mole.

And winter or summer, he always wore these grungy black turtlenecks, all stretched out and never tucked into his blue-jeans. Or maybe it was just one turtleneck. He must have had some trouble keeping the toothpaste in his mouth in the morning because he



always had this chalky splotch on his chest. You could see the finger-marks where he'd tried to smudge it away.

My mother, who I'm sure knows Aaron's last name and would tell you if you could find her, disapproved of Aaron. Her parental eyes saw something sinister in the things about Aaron that I thought were queer: the strange things he did, the shameless way he wore his toothpaste. And it was okay that Mom thought Aaron was a bad influence because I'm sure Mrs. Lipstick didn't fully approve of me either. As a rule Moms don't approve of kids who sleep out in the yard six months of the year and are named after insects. And while we're on the subject, I'm sure Mom never approved of Mrs. Lipstick and vice-versa, because Moms don't approve of other Moms who allow their children to behave in such ways. "Doesn't he have a MOTHER?" they ask, rolling their eyes back and off to the left. That was exactly the look that Mom always gave me whenever I asked to do anything with Aaron, and that stifling Thursday afternoon in July when he slimed the dollar out of me was no different.

At least I think it was a Thursday. Thursday's just the day when strange things happen to me. Dad died on a Thursday. (Giving rise to my wariness about electricity.) And Mom took off on another Thursday. I'm not complaining, I'm just saying. At least they left us the house, and Mom does send recipes.

In any case, on this particular Thursday, six years before the Thursday when my father climbed his last telephone pole and eight years before the Thursday when Mom waved good-bye from the Volvo, the air was as heavy and stale as my Grandfather's breath after he'd snuck a cigar. I was watching television, trying to stay cool, but my sister had a quadrillion of her girlfriends over and they were driving me bananas, whispering around behind me, giggling when I turned to look. My sister, only a year older than me but always reminding me how girls mature faster, wasn't too enthusiastic about this game until she realized how much it bothered me. After about an hour of this, Mom got that crinkle where her nose met her brow, like she was squinting through a really bad headache or something, and she offered to drive me to a friend's house. I called all my friends but they were all out of town or otherwise busy. I'd finally given up when there was a knock at the door that I knew had to be Aaron because nobody else ever went to our front door.

Aside from relief, I felt a certain satisfaction at Aaron's arrival because I knew that my sister disliked Aaron even more than Mom or I ever did. She said he smelled like cabbage. (I've avoided cabbage since then.) I'd also aggravated her nasty feelings about Aaron by telling her that he was in love with her and was about to ask her on a date. So when Aaron miraculously materialized in our



doorway, tugging absently at the bottom of his turtleneck, my sister and her friends giggled themselves upstairs to confer privately on the grossness of the whole situation.

"I painted my sneakers," he said. I'd already noticed that they were now the same cracked olive green as his house.

"So?"

"So my Mom's going to the mall and if your Mom can pick us up after, you want to go to the movies?"

Mom rarely addressed Aaron directly, so when we worked out the how's and when's of our trip, she asked me questions that she knew I would have to turn and ask Aaron, who stood in the doorway flexing his toes inside his brittle sneakers. She listened to the responses he mumbled to the floor, her concerned crinkle-squint falling to the little chips of green he was sprinkling on our carpet. Finally agreeing on a time, she handed me a five and we left.

The '74 Thunderbird with the white-vinyl seats careened down the highway, Mrs. Lipstick howling over the already deafening radio and dragging on her cigarette between lines. The combined stink of Mrs. Lipstick's perfume and cigarettes and the Christmas-tree air-freshener jiggling beneath the rear-view mirror made hanging out the window necessary. Aaron didn't seem to notice. He never did.

I was watching the white lines tick by, taffy stretching from dots to dashes as they approached and shrinking again behind us, when Mrs. Lipstick flicked her still-glowing butt out the window. Of course the wind knocked it right back at me. It stung the back of my hand before I could juggle it out again. I must have hollered or something because Mrs. Lipstick stopped singing.

"Oh shit, did I get you, honey?" She turned and leaned over the seat. "Lemme see. Aaron hold the wheel a minute hon'." She licked her fingers and dabbed the stinging spot on my hand, never releasing her foot from the gas.

"Is that better?"

The car jerked unsteadily in the lane as Aaron casually compensated for its natural pull to the left. I nodded, anything to make her turn around.

By the time we arrived at the cinema, I had to go to the bathroom really bad. As soon as the car stopped, the tires jouncing against the curb, I handed my money to Aaron and pushed out the door.

"Kid's got to learn to relax," I heard Mrs. Lipstick mutter, her mouth already clenched on a new cigarette. "No, Aaron, all I have is a five," she said, "take the five."

Once I'd held it under the cold water, my wound didn't actually hurt that much. I just wished I had a band-aid so I wouldn't have to look at it, the otherwise smooth skin all red and withered back like

punctured shrink-wrap. If I had a band-aid, I thought, it would be perfect again, and I wouldn't have to think about it.

When Aaron handed me my ticket, something in his manner seemed peculiar, conspicuously casual, but I was so relieved not to have wet my pants that I didn't think about it long. He had rescued me from my sister and her friends, his mother, and hadn't teased me about my bladder, so I was ready to think the best of him.

I don't remember what the movie was about, but I do remember enjoying it at the time. It was undoubtedly some cheeseball comedy that we weren't supposed to see; that was all we went to see back then. The theater was dark and cool and deserted, a great relief. I'd never been so glad to be with Aaron.

Halfway through the movie, during the only scene that I remember today, Aaron got up to buy a drink. This puzzled me for two reasons: I couldn't believe that Aaron would miss the scene that was unfolding, and I thought he'd spent all his money on his ticket. It didn't take long to figure out what had happened. Disillusionment spread through me with the same immediacy as the electric-shock orgasm the actress on the screen was pretending to enjoy. (Also the beginning of my vague fear of sex, but that's a whole 'nother story.) I dug the ticket stub out of my pocket to check. Yup. Aaron, that cabbage-stinking greasy little toothpaste-drooling snothead, had bought me a child's ticket and kept the difference for himself.

Movie theaters seem to think that financially you're an adult once you turn twelve. My friends and I decided that we shouldn't pay adult prices until they let us into adult movies, so we came up with the adult-child ticket scam. If there were five of us going to the movie, one would go up to the cashier and buy tickets for one adult and four children, and we'd all split the savings and sneak into whatever we wanted to see anyway. Aaron, by not telling me and keeping the money for himself, had violated the rebellious spirit of the whole scam. And besides, I wanted my dollar.

Aaron soon returned, the straw from his soda pushed between his lips like some disposable life-support system. I just stared at him as he settled himself back in and pushed his knees up against the seat in front of him. I tried to burn a hole in his skull with my heat-vision.

"You missed the best scene."

"Mm?" he buzzed through the straw. He didn't look at me.

"They fucked," I pronounced finally and probably a little too loudly. A couple two rows in front of us who had been locked since the lights went down, separated with self-conscious glances in my direction. Somebody snickered. Even I was surprised with my profanity. I'd never actually used the f-word with other people around and my scalp tingled.

"Mm." He flipped his hair stiffly.

I didn't watch the rest of the movie; I couldn't even see the screen through all my self-righteous spite. My wound began to burn as fiercely as if Mrs. Lipstick were there driving her cigarette down into it. I got up and held it under the bubbler, I held it to my mouth, but nothing seemed to help. Aaron pretended not to notice the way I knocked and slammed around in my seat. Every now and then I'd turn and stare at him without saying anything. Once he'd gurgled and slurped the cup dry, he started chewing the ice. Yeah, crunch away, pal. I hope you break a tooth. He ruined those sneakers, brand-new Chuck Taylors too. Look at the way he sits. He's going to dump that ice in his lap, the stupid idiot. (Of course, he did.) I bet that turtleneck's never been washed. His hair too—I bet he has lice. When you're twelve years old head-lice can be a moral issue.

When the show ended, I didn't move. I sat there and watched every credit while Aaron waited in the aisle, fidgeting his toes in his sneakers again. When I did get up, I walked slowly and didn't speak.

The ride home was equally silent and tense. Mom tried to start a conversation about whatever PG-rated nonsense we'd told her we were going to see, but I was in no mood to make something up, and wouldn't even answer her nervous queries about my hand. She of course wouldn't ask Aaron, but kept looking back at him and smiling uncomfortably, mostly to see that he was keeping his sneakers on the newspaper she'd laid in the back seat for him. When we pulled up in front of his house, I felt her eyes on me, begging me to break the silence, but I kept on staring into the wilted yellow grass of his lawn. The door opened and closed with a muffled thud and Mom and I were alone, sealed in an air-conditioned bubble.

At home, the air was still heavy and thick. I flung myself onto the couch and flipped channels, looking for something good, but all I could find were these annoying cartoons with people dropping things on each other and falling off of cliffs. They seemed so childish, I mean, compared to something like "Gilligan's Island."

The sound of the television must have drawn them. I thought at first to hide my wound, but had a better idea. I left my hand out where it could be seen and pretended I didn't know they were there. It was like magic. One went running to the medicine cabinet while the others fawned over me like I was really sick, holding their hands on my forehead and stuff like that. It wasn't that bad. My sister stood back behind her friends, trying to turn me to stone. When she stomped off and slammed her bedroom door, Mom was the only one who noticed. She had that crinkle-look again, and went off to her own room too. Later, I thought I heard her crying.

Now you might expect me to say that that was the last time I

ever did anything with Aaron, but it wasn't. There were many more days when we were both sufficiently desperate for company. Neither of us ever mentioned that afternoon, but it was always there. I mean, Aaron looked the same with his toothpaste badge and all, but that conspicuous casualness he'd adopted in the theater lobby never really left.

Once we could drive, the times we were forced together evaporated in a cloud of carbon monoxide. He disappeared sometime during high school. I don't mean to say that he started showing up on milk cartons, or disappeared like my mother did; no, one day I looked over and a new family was moving in. I was wondering if this new family had any idea how weird the people were who'd lived there before them, and I realized then that my mother had told me about this already, that Aaron's father, who was in the military, was being transferred to Utah. She had said it like "the so-and-so's are moving" though, and the words had meant nothing to me; the Aaron I knew had no last name.

All of that went through my mind when I opened the envelope and saw the dollar bill there, and sure enough it was from Aaron. The letter, as best I could decipher it, read:

*Cricket,*

*I am purging myself of negative karma under the guidance of  
The Messiah. I'm sorry about your dollar. Please forgive me.*

*The Lord lighten your heart,*

*Aaron*

I don't know. What do you say to that?



MARTY GIBEAULT

## Young California

And it would be early, and the older boys would be at school and the younger one would be home. A panel truck, white with blue script announcing "Paul's Bakery" would drive up the street early in the morning and a bell would ring and the truck would stop as the women would leave their houses and walk out into the sunshine and the driver would know that they needed his goods: donuts, pastries, and bread. Onion rolls were a nickel, and time unrushed. The young asthmatic boy, not yet in school, surrounded by his mother's chores might be given a dime and he might move towards the truck with his mother and he might buy a donut. The boy would stare at the portrait of the now dead president living on the dime and his world would be so small and uncirculated that he would believe that the face on the dime belonged to the man with the donuts who accepted it. And once he bought a creampuff.

The Santana Winds were blowing, chapping his lips. He was alone and left the yard, walking up the street following his face into the wind. He reached the corner and stopped and looking to his left saw the young tree bending as if it might break and then a green thimble notched into a branch. He walked dreamily towards the tree, looked up, and found the thimble to be the nest of a hummingbird with its long curved beak, its green and red throat hanging over the green thimble, blinking its tiny eyes and riding out the stormy hot winds. The boy knew that the bird was waiting, too small to fly against such fury, and he wondered what color and how small the eggs must be.

Some years later the boy would still have asthma and would need looking after but the world would be safe then, and he could leave the house on the weekends. In the summer the weekends never ended. Riding bikes, red, black and silver, they would ride beyond their street, turn left or right and learn about their world. Once, upon the Forth of July, they stopped at a scene of a Mexican family sitting stunned in their smoke-filled car, the doors open and the package of Black Panther Fireworks blackened and burned within the vehicle, ignited by a cigarette the father had dropped. The black and white policecar was there, and the boy saw the dark-

skinned mother crying and thought of his own, and of the red and green sparks and the rising sounds of wasted "Piccolo Petes," and he felt sorry for the children in the car.

In the riverbed lived hoboes, though none had seen them. There was a bamboo jungle where evidence of a fire was discovered, and horny-toads, and skunks. And one day they rode their bikes west, passing under all the bridges where older sin had left writing in charcoal of blasphemy and sex. Half a day riding and the riverbed filled with water they had never seen. It was the sea, and they were tired and excited and hungry. A bakery truck was there at the end, on the road. They bought three onion rolls. The burnt black onions were sweet and they found a fountain and they were fed and refreshed. It was a long ride home. They arrived at dusk and crawling into bed, under the covers, the boy would reach under his bed and pull out the tiny red and white radio shaped like a sputnik, and stick the earplug into his ear and fall to sleep to the far away sound of early, early rock and roll.

And in August it would be late and dark and they would be visiting the blind drummer, their father's friend, and outside they would know that the train would be rolling by very soon. Pennies were worth something then. Five of them together would buy something of worth: a candy bar, a pack of baseball cards, something of worth. Still, they found it not a bad investment to place them on the tracks of the approaching train, and wait. While waiting, sometimes placing their hands or ears upon the rails, they would discuss any matter of importance at the time: how the day had gone, how the next day might. They were in no hurry. They could not have known or guessed then that the world might not be kind, or interesting, or that it would one day become stripped of wonder. Then, they wondered about it all.

The train whistle would blow announcing its approach. They would giggle before laughing and then howl as the train passed over their tiny impediments to its progress. Each copper penny rolled out differently, each a work of art.

In the morning they caught spiders. Outside, near the big house, beside the cesspool that the retarded girl had once fallen into stood a tall mountain of ivy that for a time each tried to keep the others off of and call themselves king. Living in the shadows between the bright green leaves were the spiders, all yellow and black, some as large as walnuts, and they hung there waiting in huge webs dripping with rainbows, their thick black legs all outstretched. Cupping their



hands they would close the spiders up in the dark and feel them scurry about their palms and then put them in new glass homes filled with fresh grass, leaves and sticks, and rich brown dirt and they would watch and bring bugs that would curl into balls that the spiders never ate. Later, being thoughtless, they would seek shade for themselves while leaving the bottled spiders in the sun to shrivel and bake, allowing a few more moths to live.

In the shade beside the little house they rested, listening to the grown-ups talk inside. Always there was laughter. The blind drummer could remember how the skinny funny man made faces and cried, and the father would pretend to be the fat funny man saying, "Here's another fine mess you've gotten me into," and always there was laughter.

Once, the boy tried to be funny. He found a piece of chalk near the driveway and brought it in to the blind drummer and told him it was candy. The blind drummer put down the red rubber washers he would always be stringing on metal clips, ten to a clip, thanked him and stuck it in his mouth, biting down hard. The boy quickly learned that being funny was not as easy as it looked, that it could very quickly turn sad which was not what he meant at all.

There were rabbits there, living in hutches in the yard in back of the big house where the blind drummer's parents lived. The children hardly ever saw the parents except to use their bathroom. The small house had none. The children peed outside to avoid having to enter the big house because the parents were old and very stern looking and scary. The children never saw them laughing, or even smiling, and when they did have to go into the big house the parents were always there, sitting in the room where the sunlight never seemed to reach.

The boy watched as the blind drummer reached into a hutch and felt around and grabbed a grey and white rabbit by the legs and tied it, twisting and making musical noises through its nose, to a rope strung between two trees. Hanging from a cord near the rabbit was a stick which the boy watched the blind drummer find and use to hit the rabbit over the head with until it was dead. The blind drummer then found the knife and made cuts around each of the rabbit's legs and across the belly and then pulled the grey and white fur entirely off the rabbit. He cut a small sack out from between the rabbit's legs and the boy watched as what he knew to be rabbit-turds fell out of where he had cut. The boy followed the blind drummer into the small house where his wife finished cutting the rabbit into small

pieces and patted them with flour and cooked them and tried to make him eat some of it. He could not and the grown-ups laughed, and the wife who was a nurse and very fat grabbed the boy's face in both her hands and bending over him stuck her face close to his and told him to pretend it was chicken.

Once the blind drummer brought the older boys fishing in a boat on the ocean. They returned with great big goldfish and the blind drummer held the fish up and stared into the camera as a picture was taken. Later, the boy would walk over to where the fish lay in the grass and he bent over to look at them and found himself staring at the large wide-open eyes and he thought they looked like the blind drummer's eyes, dull and milky-white and unseeing.

And the week before the blind drummer dropped dead on stage after finishing a solo, he had come to the boy's house and there in the backyard under the shade of an avocado tree, drinking a thing called Apple Jack, he and the father listened on the radio to Ingemar Johansson beat Floyd Patterson in a fight. The blind drummer acted like he could see the fight, moving and weaving like a fighter might, and the boy listened with them and heard them talk of Joe Louis and Marciano and Archie Moore and Sugar Ray and Jersey Joe and a new fighter who had been in prison who they called The Bear.

And when the blind drummer died and the father had to be told and cried and cried, something changed. The world got dark, and it rained for days and days, and suddenly laughter seemed a hard thing to do, and crushed pennies under trains became for the boy a thing of the past. One day he went to look for the ones he had saved and they were gone.

## Photosynthesis

Assuming his father is a tree would clarify a great deal for Samuel. A tree is definitely different from a human being, being from an altogether different kingdom, not to mention species. A tree can't grow a beard and mustache, nor can it nurse its young, which even a father can do under extreme circumstances and with sustained stimulation of the crinkled male nipples. There are, however similarities. People are often compared to trees. Usually it is in reference to strength, i.e. "The man is as strong and quiet as an oak." Or sometimes the comparison is in reference to human behavior, as in, "He is not branching out into the more positive avenues of juvenile activity." A tree is even shaped like a human being, if that human being were standing with feet together, holding a bushel of green hay overhead. Above all, assuming his father is a tree would clarify a great deal about the sport of fishing.

His father might really enjoy fishing. Fishing is an ideal sport for an object of nature. A tree reacts to its environment, and fishing allows for loads of exposure to the elements. Sunlight is an essential component. The sun, entering the rigid cell walls of a plant generates chlorophyll through a long and complicated process of chemical reactions to which Samuel was first introduced in seventh grade Earth Science with Mr. Widgeon, who had lost all the curly hair off the top of his head. He wore long belts cinched under his distended stomach, and his shirts never stayed tucked in but never were untucked all the way around. His son went to the same school and played trombone in the C band with Samuel and sat next to him on the occasions that Samuel was promoted to second chair for his abilities or was demoted to third chair on his way down the line during another streak of unacceptable behavior. The Widgeons weren't from that area and Samuel could tell from the fakey shoes Mr. Widgeon wore and his kid's turtle necks. Mr. Widgeon burned incense in the classroom one day that smelled like marijuana so that everyone would know about it and, as he said, avoid it at all costs. Four or five of the kids in the class wore denim and one already had Thumper tattooed on her wrist; they smiled the whole time it burned and Mr. Widgeon joked with them about not teaching them anything new. Photosynthesis, the product of which is chlorophyll; essential to plant life.

The sun, besides providing a key link in the chain of photosynthesis, also stimulates the flow of water through the plant. The sun warms the fibrous tissue of the tree, which thereby thins the consistency of the saps and resins. The sun also dilates the tube-like structures that run from the roots up through the trunk and into the limbs of the tree. This process of dilation facilitates a healthy circulation of fluids through the tree. Consequently, Samuel's father would not merely enjoy the experience of fishing with his son, he would thrive on it. An early morning at a flashing stream might see the father eager to start the day's fishing, yet inhibited in his movements by the chilly-morning sluggishness of his particular bodily functions. He would help Samuel choose a spot which would best serve his son's budding passion for the spank of a fish's side on the water and the feeling of waders collapsing in on his legs as he steps deeper into the current. But the father would train his eye for a place that takes into account the thinness of the sunlight in the Northern Rockies, giving his trunk and leaves a guarantee of long-sustained exposure to a sun that shines bright like a clear-glass light bulb, but with no heat.

Samuel could stand naked in that sun for hours without tanning his legs, not like the beach down in the very south where he was invited to a beach-house near the equator by his friend's father, who must have had an almond tree because Samuel remembers eating the magenta husk of an almond, freshly picked. It was tart and he ate a lot of them because they reminded him of the smell of the Pink Ladies his mother drank so many of when they went to visit her in-laws. The almonds eventually poisoned his belly and, along with a case of sunstroke, left him on his side in the black, volcanic sand shivering and shitting a thin gruel. In his delirium, he had a dream that a hundred replicas of himself were urging him to climb onto the pyramid they were building of their sweet bodies, slick with adolescent sweat, and "Jump!" That he didn't do it lends credence to the theory that one will die in reality if one dies in one's dreams. Samuel awoke days later from his sickness, but his back was paved with healing blisters from the sun, and his nose and ears and hair were still full of black, tropical sand.

However, the sun, while promoting circulation in the tree, also leeches the water from the leaves into the air, requiring that the water be replaced. Otherwise, the leaves will turn a sick yellow, curl from the edges inward and drop off—rotten. Therefore, Samuel's father might also enjoy fishing because of the close proximity of water. His father would stand erect at the bank, watching his son cast into the water hunching over the rocks at the narrows of the stony creek—perfect. The float would bob down the channel up to the mouth of the eddy that the father had chosen, and then glide into



the deep lazy swirl near the bank. The father could reach under the earth toward that swirl and ingest water through his roots up into the dilated tubes of his trunk and his leaves would swell. And he would have company, surrounded by trees.

Trees, hardy as they seem, can't live far from water. Look at the Great Plains—no maples, no elms, no ash. There is only sagebrush, which is squat and wiry with deep roots like his grandfather. Samuel liked how the trees on his grandfather's ranch in southeastern Montana grouped themselves only on the banks of the Little Missouri and the small irrigation reservoirs where Samuel used to wade, hunting frogs. He would walk—chest deep and quiet through the clouds of red algae, looking for the periscope eyes half-submerged in the water—and slice his willow switch down, hoping to see the white belly float back up to the surface. His grandfather taught Samuel to leave them in a jar until they began to rot, cut two saplings for rods, tie on rusty hooks with six foot lengths of strong cord, and spear the saplings into the bank of the Little Missouri. He said to bait each hook with a dissolving frog and come back the next afternoon. Samuel would return to examine the skeletons of the frogs, cleaned perfectly by the scavenging carp and sunfish. But there was never a catfish gagging on the hook.

The wind is another imperative in the life of a tree. A tree must rely on the wind for the purpose of pollination. The wind captures the pollen from the pistils and carries it in a cloud to be collected by the stamen. The stamen is impregnated and the fruit or nut or seed forms around the fertilized ovum, and is in turn carried off by the wind, often times to be planted in the ground nearby. Samuel used to go visit his uncle in Billings, who had an apple tree in his front yard. Samuel would collect as many apples as possible—avoiding the dopey, engorged bees which clung to the spongy side of the bruised fruit. Then he and his cousins would hurl the fruit at the opposite curb, spraying pulp up over the fence into Dr. Mamson's back yard. His cousins had built a tree house in the apple tree closest to the street, and Samuel would overcome his fear of heights in order to sit on the gray plywood platform. By mid-October, the apples would be blown off the trees and his uncle would pay Samuel a nickel a bushel-basket to gather the apples so that he could press cider. Samuel overcame his fear of bees in this manner.

There is also just the sound. Samuel's father might stand with his flesh warmed by the sun and his leaves filled with water and he would flicker his leaves together in the wind. His twigs would clatter and the branches would moan at the flaws in their joints. He would tell Samuel how to free his line from the overhang, or reassure him that there were plenty of lures for such emergencies as a broken line. He would anticipate the day when Samuel would be

ready for flies and he would coach Samuel on the best way to cast and how to set a fly in a fish's jaw. He might talk about his own childhood and former fishing trips. And he would talk about Samuel. He would ask his son questions about what he wanted to do. Anything. He would ask about how he liked moving around as his father changed job after job. He would ask if he got along in his new school and in the neighborhood. Any friends?

Yes, assuming his father is a tree would explain a great deal to Samuel. It would explain why his father wears long sleeved shirts and long pants in the middle of summer; why his skin is baby white when he strips to shower. It would explain why he drinks only coffee and beer and the vodka he keeps in the cabinet in the tool shed. It would explain why his father is so quiet. It would explain why his father, a human being, didn't take him fishing, for example.



## James Tran

Grocery costs is what's sinful. I barely got anything and bet I'll be putting some of this nothing back, because what I have won't even pay for it.

These are the thoughts on his mind as he stacks his items neatly on the conveyor belt. He turned the price code downward to make things easier for the checker. She could just glide the stuff over the beam without having to lift anything at all. He was being very careful not to upset anyone, now even more than ever. He didn't want to draw attention to himself.

The checker told the price and he held the money out. The checker's eyes opened wide for a split second, then she tried to conceal her recognition. He cursed himself for the brief absent-mindedness.

Cursing is the only thing he's been able to do freely for the past several months. It was already too late. He could curse now.

He felt his freedom slipping away in the checker's eyes. He punched her in her open jaw, hoping to break it. As he ran for the door, her shouts made him realize he hadn't hit her hard enough. He had been thinking too much about escaping. He knew now that he should've hit her surely first, then made a break.

Stop him. He's damned. He's damned. His hands. His hands. This is what the checker screamed out of a bloodied mouth.

Nothing could have made him run faster. He was caught at the door. A big man hit him twice in his ribs. He wished he could run but fell in a fit of pain, feeling the burn of vomit in his throat.

His hand. Look at his hand. He's damned.

Someone turned his hand over and stood on his wrist. All he could do was clinch his splintered torso with his free hand, even though it mattered very little at this point.

The burn on his right palm looked more like a tattoo. It read James Tran. Once the checker explained, many people screamed. Some kicked him.

Over the past year, after the declaration of Judgment Day, many people have been damned. There were many signs. New ones all the time. One couple's first born had died and they were shot by the Holy Executioners of The Faith. A small town was demolished in a

flash flood. Wary of the survivors, The Faith put them to drown somewhere in the South Pacific.

Chris could hide his burnt hand. He quit his job immediately and began living off his savings. At first he didn't want to believe it had happened to him. He had been reading the Bible one day—everyone did these days—when the letters on the cover became very hot. It was the King James Translation of the Holy Scriptures.











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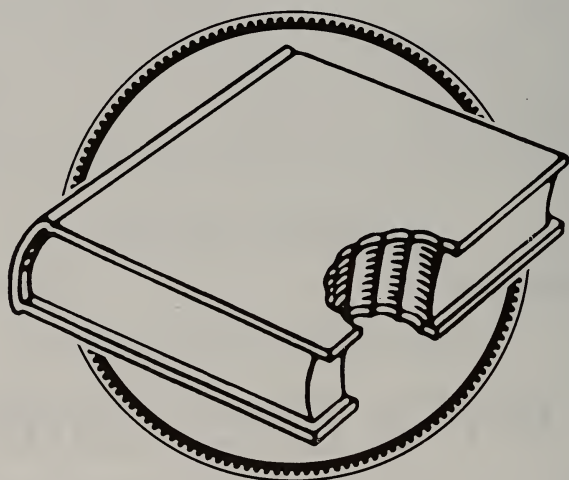
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